Raelene Clough

THE MURDER of MRS. DAVENPORT

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By ANTHONY GILBERT

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CHAPTER I

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I

THE affair may be said to have had its genesis at that momentous dinner-party of the Rossiters. In actual fact, of course, it went further back than that—fourteen years at least—to the time when Helen Davenport, like her Trojan namesake, was making men forget honour and fortune, and when one man actually did die and another risk his life for her favours. Or further still to the days when Adam lost to Eve something sweeter than life. But that may be said to be in the nature of the prologue. The first chapter that was to end so tragically began when Julian Rossiter formally announced the engagement of his distant kinswoman and ward, Lucille Tudor, to Sir Denis Brinsley. A good deal of surprise was manifested at the news; for the two appeared entirely incompatible. Lucille at twenty-three was unique, beautiful, with a fortune of forty thousand pounds and an air so aloof as to suggest that she was accustomed to this sort

of thing every night; beyond the fact that he was the eighth baronet, Brinsley didn't appear to have much to recommend him; true, he was a scientist whose name was already beginning to carry weight, but that, as Julian Rossiter shrewdly observed, was hardly likely to make his fortune. And he was a man who believed that the foundation at all events should be laid by the time a man is thirty, while Brinsley was six years past that at the time of his engagement. He was, moreover, absorbed in his work, had apparently no influential relations, no relations at all so far as the Rossiters could discover beyond a young brother even more penniless than himself, and utterly out of touch with the other members of the party, and indeed with Society generally, as society is understood in Hyde Park Corner. He had known Lucille only a few months and so far as anyone could see they hadn't a taste in common; moreover, there had been rather sinister rumours linking her name with a young writer. But perhaps Brinsley, living like a walled monk they said, had heard nothing of these; and in any case a man who is desperately poor, madly ambitious in his own peculiar sphere, and has no prospects of immediate enrichment, will swallow quite a lot for the sake of forty thousand odd.

It seemed strange to people of discernment that anything so rare and amazing as Lucille Tudor could have the faintest connection with the Rossiters who were the most common-place of couples. Julian Rossiter, somewhere in the early fifties, was suave, handsome, non-committal, one of those men who spend their first precocious years in the company

of their elders, the next thirty in what are technically called the Colonies and embrace all the world except the British Isles, and the rest in spending the money they have mysteriously accumulated; a man with a peculiar flair for spotting winners, a nice taste in wines, and an uncanny way of prophesying booms on the Stock Exchange. Bertha Rossiter was a little younger, a stout expensively-dressed woman sustained by a belief that she was a patroness of art; she would angle carefully and patiently for certain golden fish in artistic waters, and usually won them in the end. For which she could thank either her excellent cook in an age that knows little of cooks, her husband's cellar and financial genius—or Lucille. There had been men round Lucille Tudor since childhood; and no matter how old she became men there would always be, even when her loveliness was withered and her money spent. The power lay not wholly in her beauty, though that was potent enough; the body of a nymph, a Mona Lisa face and a perpetual still smile that looked so subtle and indifferent and might mean everything or nothing at all; with her great dark eyes and the black hair that was wound in coronals round her pale face making a perfect frame for its still beauty, and that air of hers of one standing a little apart from the world, without in the least suggesting mysticism. Despite her youth there was no sign of immaturity in her expression; she was remote, exquisite, rare. Indeed, people said, it wasn't surprising that Julian Rossiter, whose Hebraic strain passionately approved all things beautiful and flawless, and whose

commercial genius instantly coveted them, should have for her feelings altogether warmer than their slight relationship warranted. It might have been an awkward situation, but for Lucille's perfect self-possession.

When the announcement was made she looked across the table and met the full level gaze of Gilbert Voisey, the young writer of novels; she had been seen about a good deal with that young man; people wondered sometimes why they didn't marry, since she had money and he was rapidly earning it; then it began to be whispered that Voisey had a wife somewhere in the provinces, a landlady's daughter or something of that kind. But a good many people believed the pair had plunged desperately. They were a notable couple; Voisey was tall and slender and so fair as to be a perfect foil for her dark majesty. A ballroom floor would automatically be cleared to watch them dancing, Lucille, her pale face uplifted, rapt, like a flower on its stem, a marvel of perfect and exquisite rhythm. But her expression now, meeting Voisey's eyes, was neither rapt nor tender; it was indifferent, cool, even a little amused. Fortunately Brinsley missed it.

Gilbert Voisey was a personable young man. It was said of him by Meyrick, the writer of decadent plays that were performed on Sunday evenings by dramatic societies so exclusive that only their members knew their names, that Pan once blew a note of perfect music and the God of the Christians, who is a jealous God, stole it and wrought it into a man and that man was Voisey. It was the sort of thing

the young man loved to hear said of himself, just as he loved to be seen with Lucille Tudor.

That was doomed to be a momentous dinner-party in more ways than one. It was a fancy of Bertha Rossiter's to have a round table; she said it prevented constricted conversation at angles. What it really did was to give the guest with the loudest voice present an opportunity to dominate the talk; on this occasion it was the Honourable Ellen Barberry. Mrs. Rossiter's parties always struck one glaringly false note, just as her most priceless dress always had one jewel too much or one excessive line of decoration that spoiled the whole effect. The glaring note on this occasion was Miss Barberry. She was the author of *The Drainpipe,* a novel based on Mr. Wells' assertion that life is a mere crawling down a drain-pipe till death; and she was always foremost in press correspondence on such subjects as Should a Doctor Tell? Lascivious without wit, intolerant without virtue, she was a tall angular woman, atrociously dressed, eton-cropped, wearing magnificent diamonds. She was talking now of a famous criminal case whose defence had just closed. The man in question lay at this time under sentence of death in Pentonville.

"A man like that," cried Miss Barberry (he had murdered his mistress in peculiarly barbarous circumstances), "every decent-minded man and woman in the country must shudder at the sound of his name."

Someone leaned forward earnestly from the other side of the table. "Ah yes," she cried in a deep rich

voice, "and isn't that worse than all the bitterness of death? Wouldn't one be glad to die . . .?" She broke off, colouring profoundly as she realised that she had attracted universal attention. She was a stranger to them all, a striking, full-figured woman with magnificent golden hair and what are called golden eyes, a peculiarity that, taken in conjunction with her figure, gave her a slightly voluptuous appearance. Her voice and her whole gesture pleaded with them for that man who lay in his cell of despair. Miss Barberry's face seemed to lengthen; she was thinking quickly. "That woman," she murmured to her dinner-partner, "knows what she's talking about. She's been in the dock herself, take my word for it."

Her dinner-partner said nothing; he loathed her anyway. Helen Davenport, shrinking back, muttered desperately to Wyndham Grain, the artist, seated on her right, "Why did I say that? Did I make myself noticeable? I didn't want to."

Grain, who was sufficiently famous to dispense with the smaller courtesies, laughed brusquely and replied, "Dear lady, I thought it was the ultimate desire of your sex to be conspicuous," and went back to his plate. Mrs. Davenport continued to look distressed; one anguished glance she shot at Brinsley who sat on her left; but he didn't appear to notice. Only his brother, Dick, a young engineer, partnering an entirely colourless young woman who enthused over Dr. Saleeby's book and wished people would go about naked because it would simplify things so much, had seen the momentary start and shock that had run through the scientist when Mrs.

Davenport compelled public attention. But even he could not see his brother's thoughts.

"Is she mad, I wonder?" thought Denis Brinsley bitterly. "Does she suppose that because she changes her name and the way she does her hair people won't put two and two together? One of the greatest sensations of the time, and at least two-thirds of the people here are old enough to remember it. She'll find herself dogged by the story and all its ugly implications wherever she goes." The thought also came to him that here, too, was a spectre to dog his heart's delight; that, rising from the grave where it had been buried for fourteen years, came this grisly skeleton to threaten his life also. But of all that he gave no sign, making courteous if absurd conversation with the rather alarming lady on his left who wanted to know if he really believed that humanity would eventually complete full circle and return, via the ape, to the nerveless protoplasm of the early days of creation.

It was an awkward meal for all of them; Brinsley, himself a shy man, was further embarrassed by this sudden resurrection of an incident, passionate and disconcerting, that he had hoped buried for ever; Voisey was more perturbed at the news of the engagement than he cared to show; Lucille was ill at ease, though no one who did not know her extremely well would have suspected it; Dick was still remembering that instinctive start of his brother's, and wondering what it portended; Ellen Barberry was *distraite,* trying to fix that face; she was certain she had seen it somewhere. The other guests, feeling that an unexpected personal element not al-

together divorced from tragedy was in the air, tried to look unconcerned; only Grain and Rossiter himself seemed entirely at ease. Mrs. Rossiter was too much a creature of convention, despite her violent protests, to want her dinner-party marred by the primitive emotions. But Grain was obviously enjoying the position enormously, and no one had ever seen Rossiter at a loss. Nevertheless, for most of them it was a relief when the ladies retired and the men could forget them and turn to less controversial topics with the wine.

"Where, my dear," Ellen Barberry wanted to know, settling herself comfortably by Bertha Rossiter, "did you find her? She's amazing."

"In the oddest little place in Normandy. She was very useful to me one evening when I couldn't understand their outlandish dialect. We talked a little; she seemed very lonely and I gathered she hadn't much money. It isn't much fun for an Englishwoman in that out-of-the-way place."

"Why go there at all?"

"Do you mean her or ourselves? She was obviously staying there because it was cheap."

"I meant you."

"We were forced to spend the night there; had no choice; the wretched train broke down. And anyway Julian said there was a wonderful cave or something there I ought to see. That's why it is always such fun travelling with Julian; he knows everything and everybody; he's knocked about on the Continent for years."

Miss Barberry looked arch. "Bertha, my dear, be careful. Julian may be as faithful as Beth-Gelert but

when it comes to a woman with that figure and golden eyes . . ."

Mrs. Rossiter laughed rather loudly. "I suggested that she should come back and have a little fun in England. Poor thing!" That meant, as Ellen maliciously recognised, that Bertha had had visions of herself taking this magnificent creature under her wing from booth to booth in the society fair, gaining for herself adulation and admission that she would never have got on her own account. "She's rather clever," Mrs. Rossiter went on, "writes fashion articles."

"Did Julian get her the job?"

"Oh yes. Of course. He could get any number of jobs if he chose to exert his influence."

Miss Barberry tapped her arm with a huge orange feather fan that accompanied her everywhere. "My dear, be warned. Tighten up Julian's leash a little. You'll be sorry if you don't. That woman's too attractive to be allowed loose with a husband. By the way, did you find out anything about her?"

"Only that she was a widow, and that her husband left her very badly off. I gather the late Davenport was a clergyman of sorts."

"You're very trusting, Bertha. Personally, I like to know a little about my guests. What did she mean by that curious remark at dinner?"

"The worst of writing books," observed Bertha Rossiter comfortably, "is that you never believe anyone is genuine. She was sorry for the creature—I'm not, but that doesn't mean she shouldn't be. Oh, here they are."

She moved with relief as the men came up from

the dining-room. Brinsley, who attended dinner-parties about as often as he visited music-halls, an average of two a year, had supposed that they would play bridge after dinner; he didn't play himself, and he hoped Lucille wouldn't. Conversely, they might dance. That would be a nuisance, because he would have to sit out of the way watching Lucille drift round with that ecstatic expression in Gilbert Voisey's arms. However, they did neither of these things. Somebody sang, and somebody else played and then Rossiter took off the Co-Optimists extremely skilfully, mimicking male and female with equal success. It was more like a smoking-concert. Then somebody proposed a round game of a type unknown to Brinsley but pronounced the very latest thing by the Nude Movement lady. Brinsley refused to play and glanced cautiously round for Lucille. But she had disappeared. So, he discovered a few minutes later, with unexpected fierceness, had Voisey.

2

All round the first floor of the Rossiters' Hyde Park house, so called to distinguish it from their other houses at Epsom and Heathbridge, ran a wide verandah. French windows led from the drawing-room down three wooden steps. Out on the verandah on this splendid October night wandered Lucille Tudor, as frail and unsubstantial as a shadow in her black frock; the jade hoops that swung so gracefully from her ears were the colour of a stormy morning sky; so perfectly did she move that she

seemed to pass with one concerted movement of her whole body; she drifted out of sight of the people in the drawing-room and leaned her arms on the rail of the balcony. It was one of those still austere nights of early autumn when Nature seems utterly at peace, and beneath that tranquillity lies the mood of re-consecration; under this velvet darkness the great work of re-birth had already begun. Lucille Tudor, whose moods, despite the strange remoteness of her expression, allowed her little serenity, let that silence flow over her. But not for long. Someone came up behind her with a soft tread; someone's hands rested beside hers on the green painted rail. Gilbert Voisey said in his soft casual voice, "Well?"

For a moment Lucille could not speak. She remained staring out at the leafless boughs through whose fragile loveliness the moon peered, like a golden plate hung on a blue wall; there were three or four stars clustered round her, so large that they seemed amazingly near; and out of the west there floated a cloud that looked almost purple against that dark expanse.

Lucille moved with the old restlessness. " 'A ship, an isle, a sickle moon' . . ." she murmured, not altogether appositely.

Voisey capped her quotation. " 'With few but with how splendid stars.' Well, Lucille, you've done it for good now."

Her hands gripped the rail more firmly. "I had to do it."

"Not for my sake surely?"

"For both of us."

"What does Rossiter say?"

"Cousin Julian? Oh, you know how he feels about all men whose work doesn't lead to a fortune."

"He thinks Brinsley's found an easier road to one?"

She coloured furiously. "Gilbert, I hate you when you say things like that. Enough men have wanted to marry me for my money for me to know one who doesn't. Denis would be just as contented in three furnished rooms and a morning char. I know that at all events."

"And you're satisfied?"

"Of course I'm not. But it's the only way out."

"Out of what?"

"This terrible tangle. Gilbert, I beseech you, don't start it all over again. I can't be your wife. I won't be anything else to you."

"Can't you simply remain Lucille Tudor?"

"Not simply. You know as well as I do just how strong the danger is."

"So you're marrying Brinsley for security?"

"Yes."

"He knows that?"

"I think so. I don't know how much he actually suspects, but not much. He's been too busy to hear anything. But people have talked."

"And this marriage will silence them?"

"That isn't why. But I can't go on like this any longer."

"So you think you'll be safe now?"

"I shall never be safe." All his life he could not forget the strange brilliance of the look she bent upon him, a brilliance that was compounded of de-

spair and ecstasy and a curious nervousness. "Women like me aren't safe, whatever happens. But I shall be safer with him than I've ever been in my life before. He won't demand more than I have in my purse."

"Abstemious fellow," drawled Voisey. "Still, being married, he'll expect something."

"He has his work," she reminded him quickly.

"And you think that'll occupy a reasonable proportion of his interests? Still, there's all the remainder. Doesn't it occur to you, Lucille, that you're acting a bit precipitately? After all, you're only twenty-three. I'm twenty-nine . . ."

"And Laura is thirty-four. Oh yes, there's no reason why we shouldn't go on as we are for another thirty years."

"On the other hand, Laura may get involved in a train smash to-morrow; she may catch the germ of pneumonia to-night. She may be lying at death's door at this instant for all I know. Why be in such a terrible hurry?"

"Because I know myself. No, Gilbert," as he tried to take her in his arms, "ah, *please.*"

But he paid no attention to her, and once in his hold she forgot Brinsley waiting, a little grim and haggard, in the drawing-room and abandoned herself to this final moment of delight. Then slipping out of his embrace, she went swiftly back and sat down by her silent *fiancé*. No detail of the evening had escaped him; he noticed now her hurrying breath, the faint stain of colour in her usually pale cheeks, the manner in which she played with the jade pendant that hung on a silver chain nearly as

far as her knees; the rings in her ears trembled a little as she turned her head.

He doggedly stayed until all the guests had departed; so much he felt was his right. Dick had gone soon after dinner, having to travel to the Midlands that evening. Anyway he had only put in an appearance for Denis' sake. The guests faded out slowly, until only Denis and Mrs. Davenport remained. He realised that she proposed to stay as long as he did, and precipitate the conversation he so earnestly desired to avoid. So, foreseeing the necessity for escorting her home and recognising the futility of delaying that moment, he rose and bade his hostess good-night. Lucille, never demonstrative, was more stately than ever this evening; there was not an instant of privacy and he was unversed in the pretty manners of the drawing-room. But as he shook hands with her he felt that he was taking farewell of a stranger. Even now he could scarcely believe that in a few weeks this lovely cold creature would be an intimate part of his life. The thought scared him a little; there was nothing intimate about Lucille Tudor bidding him good-bye.

"I'm taking the tube," he observed to Rossiter in a voice loud enough to be overheard by Mrs. Davenport, who turned quickly and said in her beautiful husky voice, "And so am I."

"I didn't expect to find you there, Denis," she observed, as they turned the corner in the direction of the tube.

"Tu quoque," murmured her companion. "Do you know them well?"

"I met them abroad this summer. I'm living over

here now. I have a little flat. You must come and see me, Denis."

"I'm very busy," he said gravely. She reflected that he had changed little in this respect at all events. There was no *finesse* about him, just as there had been no *finesse* fourteen years ago.

"I've heard about your work. You always were crazy over science, weren't you? But you must spare time for me."

He shot her a rapid glance; as if he suspected coquetry, vanity or a possible threat. But there was no trace of caprice in her eyes as they met his; nor was she flourishing the whip of knowledge; but he saw sudden fear there, and it communicated itself to him. He recalled a proverb concerning old sins and long shadows, and wondered, as he had done at dinner, whether this shadow would be long enough to span that gulf of fourteen years and cloud his present happiness. For, being a modest and unassuming soul, he tasted actual happiness merely by seeing Lucille; it didn't seem to occur to him that he might make greater demands upon her.

"I live in Pontifex Mansions," Helen Davenport went on, "I'll give you the number. When will you come? It must be soon."

He asked, "Do you think it's wise?" and she returned with a hint of the passion that had been subdued for so many years, "We're dealing with something more insistent than wisdom now. Next Thursday? No? Friday then. Don't forget." And then they were at the tube where their ways parted.

That night Helen Davenport lay awake dreaming

softly, remembering days she had striven for many years to forget; she wondered how soundly Brinsley slept, and did not know that he never went through the pretence of going to bed at all, but sat smoking and frowning, weighing up the possibilities of disaster in this reuniting of old ties. The rest of the dinner-party seemed unaware of possible tragedy, except Dick who recalled his brother's moment of self-betrayal, and who hoped no one else had noticed it. But someone else had and that man Wyndham Grain.

CHAPTER II

OLD SINS HAVE LONG SHADOWS

PONTIFEX Mansions, Pontifex Street, is a block of unpretentious flats off the north of Oxford Street. These flats for the most part consist of three rooms, a bathroom and kitchen; rents are moderate; there is no lift, though there is an intinerant hall-porter who is on view for an hour or so a day. During the earlier part of the morning he is engaged in what he calls "backstairs work," which means polishing, cleaning and washing; later, he spends a good deal of time at his numerous "meals"; still, he is ostensibly there to take messages, receive parcels for absent tenants and give information. But when asked if so-and-so is in or out he merely perks his head at the board which registers "In" and "Out" for the benefit of those who can be bothered to use it.

Mrs. Helen Davenport had a flat on the second floor. There had been a time, during the year preceding her marriage, and the first three or four that followed, when she would have scorned such meagre accommodation and so little comfort; but since that time she had known such dire poverty that she felt almost luxurious by contrast. Since Hilary died . . . she shuddered; she hated to think about Hilary, and yet the man who was coming to-night would remind

her most poignantly of those days that she had striven so hard to forget. Denis Brinsley! Memory lingered tenderly over the name. In the welter of unhappy memories that included her marriage and its consequences there was still something to be thankful for in that name. He had changed, she knew; fourteen years take a heavy toll of the most flippant; and even in those days he had been a brilliant, hard-working youngster, imbued with all the desperate seriousness of youth. That was why she had been attracted, of course; he had been so unlike the foppish philandering crowd Colonel Courcy gathered at his house. To save herself from being overwhelmed by these memories she got up and went into the kitchen where various delicious things cooked slowly in casseroles; having attended to them she came back to the dining-room, looking anxiously at the table, though she knew her guest would scarcely notice the preparations she had made for him. The room was small but well-furnished; she had gone patiently from sale to sale to get that furniture; flowers and books, both of which are expensive if you are an epicurean and only like the best, were few, but those few of fine quality; two or three excellent etchings hung on the walls; Mrs. Davenport herself, in a home-made brown velvet that looked like Bond Street, had the gift of furnishing a room merely by sitting in it. Despite the tragedy and anguish that had dimmed those earlier years she was still a strikingly handsome woman; her clear amber eyes, her coils of corn-coloured hair, the warm reflection thrown by the brown velvet dress on neck and face, made her appear younger

than she was. She had to-night a kind of inner radiance that lighted a flame within her.

Waiting for Denis she felt her pulses begin to tingle in the old heady delightful way. Long before her marriage, when she had been at home in the world of society, she had loved the power she wielded there; after marriage she had felt it less, and since her widowhood she had been terribly poor and had lived in great seclusion. Now the old excitement was returning; she felt her cheeks glow and she smiled with a kind of mysterious joy.

Then she heard his foot on the stair; she knew it instantly, though feet had been ascending and passing her door for the last two hours. She thought passionately that if she lay in her grave and his foot passed her by she would stir in her chill dust to hear it. And she was not a melodramatic or sensational woman. The feeling was in her like breathing and exulting. There had been other men in her past, but none who had affected her in precisely the same way as the young lover who had finally eluded her. She had been, they said, a golden girl, and the glory that the woman had missed came flooding back to her now as she waited, until she seemed more beautiful even than Lucille Tudor who had resembled Hans Andersen's Ice Maiden in her exquisite stony repose.

The step paused at her door and someone rapped. She kept no maid and herself let him in.

"I don't know if you meant me to dress," he said. Living for science as he had done, with no companion but his young brother, who was almost as fanatical a toiler as himself, he had come to think

little enough about clothes. She saw that he had put on a dinner-jacket at least three years old—she was a woman who instinctively noticed these things —and realised that he was entirely oblivious to such conventions. Well, he hadn't altered in that either; he had always been the worst-dressed man in her husband's house.

"I'm not really dressed myself," she explained. "We'll eat first and talk business afterwards."

That expression "business" struck him as sinister; but he was quite impassive as he sat down and began to taste the various things that had been concealed in the tiny casseroles.

"What have you been doing for the past fourteen years?" he asked, because it was a question that must obviously be asked sometime.

"Oh, living in one wretched foreign *pension* after another, miserable second-rate little places because that was all I could afford; hiding my head in the sand and never talking to anyone, and presently moving on. . . ."

"From choice?"

He saw the shudder than ran through her body. "No. Because someone began to whisper. They'd find out something about Hilary." She shuddered again. "'He being dead yet speaketh.' Who was that? Anyway, it's Hilary. He has spoken from the grave all these years and until I die, too, he'll never be silent. I always knew the signs. Half-a-dozen women, including two or three English spinsters who live abroad because it's cheaper than Bloomsbury and less squalid, collect together in a corner and talk earnestly in whispers, every now and then darting

glances at me over their skinny shoulders. I can guess what they're saying. 'My dear, didn't you *know?* Oh yes, that's her maiden name. She took it after the trial. Oh my dear, the most *tremendous* sensation. She was accused of *poisoning* Colonel Courcy. The *handsomest* man and *so* gallant. They say his manners to her were *perfectly* lovely.' And so they were, Denis," she added bitterly. "'Yes, a lot of people thought she had done it. But she had a *very* clever lawyer. He really got her off.' "

"That part's true enough," agreed Brinsley soberly. "He was a brilliant fellow. If ever I'm standing trial for my life I should like to feel the matter was in his hands."

"Why should he be called clever because he got me acquitted for a crime of murder that . . . I hadn't done? And on circumstantial evidence, too!"

"Plenty of people have been hanged on less. What made you come back to England?"

"I hated those places so, Denis. I couldn't bear it any longer."

"But do you suppose people won't rake up your history here too?" he demanded sombrely.

"I daresay they will. I daresay they have already. That woman in the orange velvet with gimlet eyes looked as if it was all written in her brain now. But I had to come back. I wanted help."

Dinner was almost over now; she brought him coffee and by common consent they moved from the table, carrying the small cups over to the tiny fire.

"Moral assistance?" questioned Denis, and there was a shadow of a wry smile on his lips.

"No. Money."

He seemed startled. "Blackmail?"

"Not me, but . . ."

"You're being blackmailed?"

"Yes."

"Don't give in to the fellow whoever he is. Once you begin he'll never let you go. Like the spider."

"You mean—let him tell? Are you mad, Denis?"

She saw that his face was grave and haggard as it had not been a week ago. She thought, "Those lines came since he met me. He's afraid, I suppose, of losing that girl," and then she remembered that Miss Tudor was reputed to be very wealthy.

He asked "What are you afraid of? That he'll tell your world that you are really Helen Courcy who fourteen years ago was tried for the murder of your husband Colonel Courcy, and acquitted? But they'll find that out in any case. They'd probably find it out about any woman; but about anyone who's in any way noticeable . . ." There was no trace of compliment about the words as he said them. He seemed both for her sake and his own to be regretting her brilliant and unusual beauty. As, in fact, he was.

She shook her head. She was very pale now and the coffee cup trembled in her hand.

"Not that? Then you're afraid he'll tell the world that you are Helen Courcy who did murder her husband by poison at Rocqueville fourteen years ago."

For an instant he thought she would faint; the colour had receded from the firm cheeks, life literally seemed to sag out of her body; she was more

like a ghost than a woman; she even seemed physically shrunken.

"Is that a guess, Denis?" He would not have recognised her voice. It was like a spectre of itself.

"No."

"Then you knew all the time?"

"All the time."

"You didn't say anything?"

"I wasn't a witness."

"If you had been?"

"I shouldn't have given you away."

"You'd have perjured yourself? I'm glad to know you would have done that much for me."

"No, I shouldn't have perjured myself. It wouldn't have been necessary. I shouldn't have been questioned on that point."

"How did you—know?"

"The faked alibi. You said you'd spent the day at Rocqueville the momentous day, and someone swore they'd seen you there, recognised that amazing rose-coloured frock of yours. They didn't know it was your maid. Did you give it her?"

She shook her head. "No. She wore it. She knew I wouldn't dare dismiss her. She could have made things look very ugly, with her prying and peeping and lying. And people love to believe the worst of any woman who's a shade better-looking than themselves. But how did you know?"

He answered simply, "I was in the Rue Janvier myself that afternoon. I saw you coming away from the chemist's shop."

"Of course, no one questioned the story. How could they guess?"

"Then you deliberately intended to murder Colonel Courcy? It wasn't a mad impulse?"

She threw out her hands in an abandonment of passion. "No. You think it's horrible, vile, inexcusable . . . Oh yes, a very proper attitude. And once I should have agreed. But you don't know—nobody knows, nobody in the world—what I suffered at that man's hands. From the very beginning there were other women; he hadn't even the decency to pretend they didn't exist; he flaunted them at me, expected me to receive them at my dinner-table; he drank perpetually, only the servants could tell how cruel he was—not merely physically cruel, I mean, but the way he treated me. He knew I wanted a child, and he mocked me because I had none. And outwardly he was so charming. He loved to hear people say that my extravagance would ruin him, if I bought a frock or a shawl; he would make me presents publicly so that they could murmur, "How generous the Colonel is to his wife!" There came a time when I couldn't stand it any longer."

"You could have left him."

"I hadn't a penny."

"And you thought if he were out of the way there'd be his fortune."

"If ever a woman earned a living that woman was I. He was a foul beast, he had no right to live . . ." her voice lifted a little and she hid her face in her hands. Denis moved across to the window and looked down at the dim street with its miniature black and orange taxis bowling past and its trees at regular intervals along the pavement, like the toys of a Noah's Ark.

Presently from the stillness behind him Helen's voice said, "That doesn't matter now. It's done. I paid, and I'm still paying. He was clever, fiendishly clever. He meant me to starve if he could, and he did his best by leaving his money to a distant cousin. Of course, the prosecution made a lot of that at the trial; they said that we must obviously have been on such bad terms . . ."

"Stacey was a first-class lawyer," Denis said slowly, coming back to the hearth. "He made that point tell in your favour; asked what motive you had since his death left you a pauper . . ."

"They tried to show I didn't know what Hilary had done. As for motive, they said I had a lover, that Hilary's death freed me to go to him."

"I remember," he agreed, as pale as she and rigid as marble, seeing as in a glass darkly the part he was going to be called upon to play in this drama.

"I didn't let them bring any names into it," Helen went on slowly, her amazing golden eyes searching his inexpressive face. "There was a suggestion—it might have strengthened my defence—but I refused."

Denis bowed but said nothing; he was taut as strung wire; only his dark eyes fixed so vividly upon her seemed to hold every atom of life in his tense alert body.

"And now?"

"My hand is being forced. I'm being threatened."

"You won't tell me who he—or she—is, of course? That would be asking too much."

Her magnificent eyes, staring into his, seemed

darker because of the great fear that shook her. "I don't know, Denis."

"Don't know?" He sounded incredulous.

"No. I only suspect."

"Whom?"

"A man who used to come to Hilary's house sometimes, a type you often meet abroad, the well-bred loafer living by sponging on the simple. I was a fool, of course. Soon after I married, when I first began to find out about Hilary's—about Hilary, he wanted to be *sympathetic.* And I resented it. It seemed to me horrible that because Hilary was—what he was, I should come down to his level to amuse one of his friends. I suppose I was less than tactful. I hated him."

"What makes you pick him out?"

"Because I thought all through the trial—he came and listened most attentively. And when it was over he congratulated me as a man does who knows something that hasn't come out."

"If he gives you no address how does he expect you to send the money?"

"He has given me an address of a sort—at a Post Office, under the initials X. Y. Z."

"You could report the matter to the police and have him watched."

"But if I send him nothing . . ."

"He'll have to enquire. It's your only chance."

"I don't suppose he'd go himself. And I've nothing to prove who it is."

"You say he writes. . . ."

"Yes, but quite anonymously; and they're typewritten, not done by hand. I've had three 'letters'

so far. Here they are." She drew open a drawer and showed him three slips of paper with neither greeting nor signature, typewritten in rather faded characters on what appeared to be sheets of paper torn from an octavo writing-pad.

I wonder if you recall Annette Lecoq. She is now in England and most interested to hear of your return. She remembers perfectly all the details of that sad affair fourteen years ago. As do I.

The first note ended abruptly there, threatening yet elusive. Denis frowned. "That came a month ago," cried Mrs. Davenport. "It says nothing, but hints at horrors. I could only wait; exactly a week afterwards came the second."

"Where from?"

"The same person, of course."

"I meant the postmark. Did you keep the envelopes?"

She shook her head. "It didn't occur to me."

"Not any of them?"

"Not one. Of course, I ought to have done. I was so terrified I couldn't think."

"But you kept the letters?"

"What else could I do? Here's the second."

This in appearance resembled the first.

Mlle. Lecoq came to see me this afternoon. She is expecting another child—you knew that she was married?—and her husband is, most unfortunately, unemployed. There are many expenses to be met, and she would be most grateful for a little financial help. She is ashamed that you should know of her poor condition, but any small offering will reach

her without delay through me. I am also most unexpectedly in a difficulty myself; a sum of two thousand pounds would clear Mlle. Lecoq's debts and repay me for my trouble. X. Y. Z. % Post Office, Charing Cross, will find me.

"You see? I don't for one moment believe he's seen Annette, but he certainly knows where she is to be found. And she's a typical French peasant. She'd agree to anything for a bit of money. She'd see me hang with no more compassion than if I were a pullet on a line."

"She can't do that," observed Denis heavily, "you can't be retried after an acquittal."

She looked at him strangely. "You think that's the only thing that matters?"

"Not a bit. Where's the third letter? Then we can discuss things and see what's the best to be done."

The third was also short.

Mademoiselle's creditors are demanding immediate payment, alternative to ejecting her from her house. In her condition it would be most unwise to allow this. My own tradesfolk are being equally complimentary in their intentions. I shall esteem it a favor to have your assistance as speedily as possible.

"And you got the last one?"

"The day of the dinner-party at the Rossiters'. Well, Denis?" She laid the three sheets on the table and stood looking, not at them, but at her companion.

"This Lecoq woman was the maid, I suppose?"

"Yes. I suppose *he* also was in the Rue Janvier

that afternoon. At all events he knows I wasn't. You see my danger?"

Denis asked slowly, "And if you don't find the money?"

"He'll tell the truth, I suppose. But, of course I must."

Denis considered for a space. "Why didn't he give evidence at the trial?"

"Because, like you, it wasn't his affair. He didn't want to condemn a woman sorely pressed—all that chivalrous fandango. But if I refuse him he'll drop poison into the ears of all the people I meet—like Hamlet's mother dropping poison into the ear of the king, and—can't you see that *mustn't* happen?"

"He says he knows this girl?"

"Oh yes. He wouldn't bring her up in person, of course. He'd be far too discreet. Just a little laugh, a hint—'I know the girl who wore the frock, to be perfectly candid,' shrugged shoulders, a gesture —a reed is strong enough to ruin a reputation like mine."

"You haven't thought of leaving England again?"

"Leaving England? How can I? There's no one out there who can help me."

"And here?"

"There's you."

His eyes were hard as they met hers. "I'm a poor man, Helen. I don't live any more luxuriously than you do. I couldn't lay my hands on a substantial sum, even if I had any desire to see my cash pass into the trouser-pocket of a blackguard. My advice to you is to stick out and refuse to yield up a penny."

"You might as well say take poison yourself. One's about as useful as the other."

"Once you give in you'll find the man a millstone round your neck all your life."

She took no notice of that. "Then you won't help me? Very well, Denis. You force my hand. Though the prosecution mentioned no names and my defence did likewise there were plenty of people to point out the lover who was also my accomplice. There was a good deal whispered about 'young Brinsley,' 'in and out of the house like a tame cat, my dear,' at that time."

"Are you blackmailing me now?" His tone was almost indifferent.

"No. But I've something to sell you."

"And that is?"

"Some letters you wrote me fourteen years ago."

"You haven't kept them all this time?"

"Yes. I valued them once. I've never had the heart to destroy them. They might be useful to you now. They're—revealing, Denis."

He agreed instantly. "Oh, they would be. I was —twenty-two, was it?—when I wrote them? It's a revealing age."

"You loved me then," she challenged him in sudden passion.

"It was fourteen years ago and I thought you the most beautiful woman in the world. I went away because of you in the end."

"I wonder if you ever thought of me again?"

"Oh yes." He smiled. "For quite a long time. And then I thought of science—equally exclusively."

"And now," she finished for him, "you think of Lucille Tudor."

His face changed as if he would not so much as have that name mentioned between them. He said abruptly, "Helen, I came here because you wanted me. You've told me what's wrong. I can't help you and I strongly counsel you to ignore this blackguard."

She interrupted him. "And you won't contemplate buying those letters back?"

He shook his head.

"Have you forgotten what's in them? There wouldn't be a shadow of doubt in anyone's mind if they read them."

"I think," he told her gravely, "I had better have them."

"I've got to find two thousand pounds, Denis."

"No, Helen. Not that way."

"You won't give me so much? There's a good deal at stake, remember."

He seemed genuinely surprised. "I didn't mean to pay for them at all. They're my letters really. Give them back to me."

"*Give* them to you?"

"Yes. You can't want them now."

Her voice changed, becoming dry and harsh. "Those letters are for sale."

"Not to me. Helen, if it meant the end of all my dreams I wouldn't buy those letters. Once you're in that net there's no way out except one."

"Suicide?"

"Yes. Go to the police if you like. But for Heaven's sake grasp your nettle boldly."

"That's your last word?"

"Yes. Quite apart from anything else, I don't possess two thousand pounds in a lump."

She said steadily, "You're going to marry a very rich woman."

"I'm afraid it doesn't occur to me as reasonable to expect my wife to settle such bills as these."

She cried out, "You're very considerate for her. Have you no pity to spare for me?"

He argued with her quite fruitlessly. "Can't you see there's nothing to prevent his passing on that information to a pal, and putting him into the blackmailing firm? Helen, whatever happens, don't let them get you. There's only one end and you'll come to it."

She refused to be coerced. "I'm desperate, Denis. I've got to have that money. I won't be pushed down into the mud again. You don't know what it's like, or you wouldn't be so glib about thinking of other victims. I'm thinking of myself. You wouldn't like Miss Tudor to see those letters?"

"To show her how completely I could make a fool of myself? Hardly."

She smiled with dry bitterness. "Making a fool of yourself by falling in love with me?"

"Any man who allows himself to fall in love with another man's wife—particularly if he's penniless and without prospects—is a fool. I don't urge any excuses."

"But you feel that I, being seven years your senior,

should have prevented it. You were very passionate then in your declarations."

And so on. The weary argument wore the hours away; it was after eleven, and Brinsley had to be at his laboratory early the following morning. He persisted in his advice to disregard the leecher; she clung to her threat to send the letters to Lucille. Though outwardly he made light of that, he was inwardly terribly perturbed. Walking back, because he could think better when in motion, he recalled her last words, "You haven't very long; you'd better think it over and let me know. Then, if wisdom still governs you, Miss Tudor will have some very interesting reading." He knew that his hold on Lucille was so slight that such a shock might dispossess him of her altogether. And though he did not suppose she would dream of reading those letters the fact that he had been knit up with a woman who had immediately afterwards become notorious in several countries would be enough to ruin his hopes. He was quite sure that Helen would send them, even though she herself gained nothing by it; a woman who in cold blood would murder her husband would scarcely hesitate over a trifle like a packet of letters.

CHAPTER III

STRAWS IN THE WIND

1

DICK BRINSLEY was greatly perturbed. He had just come back from his office to find the afternoon post lying on the hall table; and the afternoon post to-day, as it had been for many days past, consisted of a single square blue envelope addressed in a woman's vigorous hand. It wasn't Lucille's writing, as Dick knew; and daily letters from some other woman a month before his wedding seemed to Dick ominous. He knew perfectly well who sent them; and he wondered more than ever what sinister link there was between Mrs. Helen Davenport and his brother. That Denis had seen her at least once since the dinner-party at the Rossiters' he knew; the fact that he had said nothing of it confirmed the young man in his belief that danger threatened. Why should a woman suddenly start writing daily notes to a man who is on the eve of marriage with someone else? And that Denis was madly in love with Lucille, Dick was certain. This unknown woman, therefore, could only mean mischief. He wished he could pitch the thing in the fire, but he had a natural respect for other people's correspondence. Denis' appearance also was the source of some conversation in the kitchen, where Mayes gravely talked to himself, and of serious misgivings

to Denis' friends. These last usually supposed he had discovered some of that scandal concerning Lucille and Gilbert Voisey. No one suspected Helen Davenport's existence.

The telephone bell at his elbow began to peal. He lifted the receiver. "Is that you, Denis?" exclaimed an agitated feminine voice, a low, beautiful voice it was. "I want you at once. Yes, you must come." The urgency of the voice betokened a terrible depths of despair. "It's five-thirty now. I shall expect you in twenty minutes. Take a taxi."

Dick got a word in. "I'm afraid it's my brother you want. He isn't here. This is Richard Brinsley speaking."

Even over the wires the dismay was obvious. "I beg your pardon, I'm afraid I didn't realise he had a brother. This is Mrs. Davenport. Could you perhaps tell me where I could find Sir Denis?"

Dick hesitated. He wanted to say he hadn't the slightest idea but if the matter really proved to be urgent there might be trouble when Denis found out. So he replied reluctantly, "I expect he's at his laboratory. I can give you the number."

"Thank you so much. That is very kind of you. I wouldn't trouble him when he is busy if it weren't extremely important. Good-bye."

"Damn the woman!" thought Dick bitterly, scowling at the blue envelope. "Isn't writing every day enough for her?"

Five minutes later the telephone rang again. "I wanted to say that it's all right. I got Sir Denis at his laboratory. He's coming at once. I'm so very sorry to have troubled you unnecessarily."

Dick said politely, "Not at all," and went to see if Mudie's had brought anything worth reading. Finding a book dealing with a corpse and a strong silent hero, he forthwith became so deeply immersed that it came as a shock to see Mayes, who acted as butler, footman, valet and man-of-all-work, standing in the doorway.

"It's nearly seven o'clock, sir. I think you wanted dinner early."

"So I do. Lord, I'd no idea it was so late. Is Sir Denis in?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Oh? Well, give him another quarter of an hour. I shan't leave till five past eight. And I shall want a taxi then."

Mayes still lingered. "I think Sir Denis is dining out to-night."

"Is he?" Dick scowled; surely Mayes didn't know anything about the golden-headed siren.

Apparently Mayes did not. "I think he said he was dining with Mr. Rossiter at his club."

"What we should do without you, Mayes, I can't think," observed his junior employer. "Let's look at the tablets." He turned up a diary on his brother's desk. "Quite right. Then there's nothing to wait for."

At that moment a key turned in the lock and an instant afterwards Denis came in, wearing a dark blue overcoat but no hat.

"Mayes, turn me on a bath, will you? At once. I've run it a bit fine. And I shall want a taxi at twenty-five past seven. Rossiter," he added, as the servant disappeared, "is one of those unholy beg-

gars who turn up to an appointment seven and a half minutes too early, and I want to keep in with him just now."

"I daresay you're wise," Dick agreed, "does he expect you to dress?"

"He does not, thank Heaven. There are many traits in Rossiter that I dislike, but he has certain of the humanities. All I want is a bath; I've had a pretty sticky day. All the same," he added reflectively, "I wish I knew why he dislikes me—or rather the idea of Lucille marrying me."

"You don't read your daily feuilleton—or don't they have one in the Times? With her fortune Lucille should have trailed a Maharajah or an Italian count. A penniless British title is very small beer."

"No doubt you've struck it. Also, as soon as we're married, I shall propose to Lucille that she put all her funds in something safe and deadly like Consols. Mr. Julian Rossiter is the smartest business man I know, but I believe in having money where you can touch it. Lucille doesn't know the first thing about business. Any letters?" Then he saw the blue envelope and took it up. Dick watched him. It struck him that his brother's manner was jerky and unnatural. His whole appearance was exhausted; it was only quite lately that he had developed dark rings round his eyes and that peculiar dead-white colour that Dick didn't at all care about. Meanwhile Denis, absorbed in his own thoughts, stood by the table tapping the letter against the back of his hand, as if considering.

Dick had an impulse of glaring indecency and

yielded to it. "I suppose, Denis, you know Mrs. Davenport pretty well?"

"Mrs. Davenport? What the deuce . . . Oh, you mean this?" He had his voice well under control as he threw the letter on to the table, but his brother knew that he considered him guilty of impertinence. Dick coloured a little; he was nine years Denis' junior, the sister who had come between them having died in infancy. "Not at all," he defended himself, "but she telephoned here in no end of a stew this afternoon . . ."

Denis didn't move and that unexpected rigidity sent a sinister fear into Dick's mind. "Telephoned here, did she?" the older man repeated after a minute. "Oh, I didn't know she'd done that."

"Yes. She wanted you in a frightful hurry. It was no use telling her I didn't know where you were . . ."

Denis turned; there was a strange fierce light in his eyes. "Why didn't you?" he demanded. "I don't want to be bothered with—personal problems at the laboratory."

Dick, a little abashed, murmured, "Sorry, old chap," and then Denis recovered a sense of proportion and laughed.

"Are you worrying over my moral status?" he quizzed him.

Dick, looking more uncomfortable than ever, and discreetly buried behind an evening paper, mumbled something about being so much immersed in science that he knew nothing of women.

"Oh, wise young man!" agreed Denis solemnly.

Dick put the paper down. "That's all very well, but I bet you Lucille wouldn't like it. Girls don't. And a woman can make a fellow look such a fool."

"You're afraid I may get stung? I take it very kindly of you, brother. However, your scruples are unfounded. I don't expect to see anything more of Mrs. Davenport, whatever happens." He drew a long breath, then suddenly shivered. It was as if he contemplated something unspeakable. But the smile with which he turned at the door was wholly good-natured. "You're taking Lesley to a show somewhere, aren't you?"

"The Comedy."

"To see the latest thriller? Morbid tastes you two have. And Lesley looks like a carven saint! If I'm in bed when you return you needn't trouble to come in and kiss me good-night. I'm fagged to death and haven't slept for nearly a week."

As he disappeared along the corridor in the direction of the bathroom Dick muttered, "No, and you look like it." Mayes, catching his eyes, agreed respectfully. "Working himself to death, I should say, sir. I don't know what his young lady must think . . ."

"She isn't likely to confide in you, Mayes. She doesn't even tell me. But if I were a girl and my groom came into church looking like an escaped scarecrow I should postpone the wedding until after the medical examination. I think I'll feed now."

For the rest of the evening there was Lesley to think about.

2

Denis reached Rossiter's Club in Piccadilly five minutes late, after his usual habit; fortunately, though uncharacteristically, his host had not arrived, and having hung his coat in the lobby Denis went into the smoking-room and sat on the club fender; ninety seconds later he saw a man he knew, one Edward Sutherland, editor of a scientific periodical to which Brinsley frequently contributed. Sutherland nodded and came across the room to him. He regarded him for a minute in silence.

"Have you seen a doctor?" he queried rather surprisingly.

"A doctor?"

"Yes. And you might throw in a mental specialist while you're about it. You look like the grave. I don't know if it's the suspense or terror or ecstasy, but whatever it is I hope it'll soon wear off. You'll find yourself in an asylum with bailiffs on your doorstep at this rate."

"If you're in an asylum you're immune from bailiffs. What are you driving at, Teddy?"

"That last article you sent me. Lucky for you I read it, and know you. Otherwise I should tell my secretary to make a note of your name and return unread all future efforts. Are you mad? Or is this merely the effect of the Damoclean sword of matrimony hanging over your head? You don't look as if you've slept for a week."

"I gather you don't care for the article?" hazarded Denis. "Please explain it all to me in words

of one syllable. I'm a thought fatigued this evening."

"Care for it? It's utter bilge. I don't say your thesis is insupportable; it's startlingly original; but you wouldn't convince a day-old baby with the arguments you've used. Take my advice, old son, and either get the damn thing over or break it off. But don't, I beseech you, go on like this."

"I felt a shade unhappy over that article, I recall. It appeared so lucid in prospect and so confused in print."

"It sounded dam' rot in print. I'll send you back the manuscript. You read it again and tell me candidly if you don't agree."

Denis with a sudden gesture put his hands over his eyes, and smoothed them back over his sleek dark hair.

"Fact is, I'm not sleeping too well. I'll chuck articles for a bit."

Sutherland looked puzzled for a moment. Then he said earnestly, "I'm a dozen years older than you, old man. If you funk going through with this thing, for the Lord's sake break it off before it's too late. If you make a mistake of that kind now it'll ruin your whole life—and your work will suffer."

"Thanks for the hint. It wasn't that I was thinking of. Hullo, here's Rossiter at last."

Rossiter had come in with an acquaintance he had met on the doorstep. He was talking so eagerly that he walked past the door of the smoking-room, that stood wide open, without seeing his guest. They

lingered another minute or two in the lobby, still chatting. Denis, outwardly calm, was inwardly a little enraged. He felt that this tardiness of Rossiter's was deliberate, intended to emphasize his disapproval of the marriage. He (Denis) was a poor unambitious devil who proposed to spend his life in work that was anything but remunerative. Beggars go to the back door, he reflected grimly. He resented the attitude, feeling that the very fact of Lucille being betrothed to him gave him an importance that Rossiter of all men should not overlook. At the moment, however, when the tide of his indignation was rising dangerously, his host appeared, still with the acquaintance at his side.

"Not a three-handed game surely," thought Denis. But his apprehension was groundless, for the pair parted on the threshold. Rossiter was smoking and demonstrating something with the hand that held the cigarette. "Last year's, fortunately," he called, as the two separated. "*Au 'voir*. Hope I haven't kept you waiting," he added to Denis civilly enough. The latter was aware that his cue was a polite "Not at all" but instead he replied briefly, "It's of no consequence. I ran across Sutherland—a pal of mine. Most interesting chap."

"Glad you weren't bored. Fact is I've been trying to sandwich in a dentist with other things." He dropped the stump of the cigarette into a blue china bowl. "Come to this table at the far end. We shall be out of the draught. I've had toothache for the last week."

It became clear after the first course or so that what Rossiter really wanted to discuss was the ques-

tion of marriage settlements. He approached the subject delicately, but Denis, who was angry and *distrait,* demolished his polite vagueness and came direct to the point.

"You know my financial position," he protested. "I've put it to you clearly more than once. I have an independent income of a little over five hundred a year, and I can make about eight by writing and lecturing. That's more than enough for me as a bachelor."

"But when you've married Lucille you won't be a bachelor any longer. And I think she has some right to expect a suitable arrangement."

"Look here, Rossiter, what's the good of going into all this again? You know perfectly well that Lucille could buy me up lock, stock and barrel every day of the week. As for settlements, she's got her own money—I understand it's something in the nature of two thousand or more a year—and if she were widowed the day after the ceremony or twenty years after it she'd still have her own money."

"Except what you'd persuaded her to sink in your scientific experiments."

Denis' face was quite impassive as he agreed. "Except what I'd persuaded her to sink in my scientific experiments. The fact is, Rossiter, I'm like the hero in the fairy tales, who always won a princess and half her kingdom. I don't recall a single instance, except the Little Goose-Girl, where the prince provided the kingdom. Dowerless ladies were unpopular with the historians."

Rossiter said abruptly, "You could get some sort

of regular job if you liked. Scientific instructor at an institution. I know a fellow called Herrick . . ."

"I also know Herrick, for my sins be it said. He's been trying to inveigle me into that job for the past two years—at my own salary."

"Why don't you take it?"

"Who'd do my work if I did?"

"Your work? You'd be doing it yourself."

"I mean at the laboratory. I couldn't keep on with that and justify Herrick's expectations of me. And the work I'm doing now is of the utmost importance."

"More important than Lucille perhaps?"

Denis waited a long time before he answered. Then he said doggedly, "Yes, even more important than Lucille. Lucille, after all, is a luxury. Most wives are. I suppose that's why there's an increasing demand for celibacy among the clergy, who're the official leaders of the ascetic movement."

"And the people to whom wives are not a luxury?" asked Rossiter drily.

"The people whose work would fall to the ground without them, men who consider their job in life is to be fruitful and multiply. That isn't a one-man job; but I'm not of them. I should like a son to carry on where I stop, but my interest is chiefly scientific even in that direction. I don't know what Lucille's views are, because I haven't asked her, but I should think they tally pretty well with mine. Have you ever noticed that Lucille doesn't tell you anything until you ask? Most people want to tell you everything without the slightest encouragement."

Rossiter paid no attention to that. He said slowly, "As Lucille's guardian, I'm bound to make the best terms I can for her. Have you no suggestions?"

"I'll settle what I possess on her, of course, if you think that's necessary. Personally, I call it sheer idiocy, because in an emergency she wouldn't touch my cash. Naturally not. She's got enough of her own. And if I dropped under a lorry it would automatically pass to her. I wish you'd tell me," he wound up unexpectedly, "why you're so much opposed to the match." Even he had heard the rumour that Rossiter was secretly in love with his ward, and would not have mourned Mrs. Rossiter if any mishap had overtaken her. But since Bertha was of the type that lives into nonegenarianism he thought in amazement, "Is the fellow so crazy about her that he can't stand the idea of seeing her marry another man?"

Rossiter had not anticipated such a candid advance. A dull colour showed in his face as he said, "You don't mind my being frank?"

"I shall probably dislike it extremely, but I may as well hear your objections first as last."

"Then—and don't think, my dear fellow, I want to wound you, but you're a man of the world" ("Heaven forefend!" murmured Denis softly, but his host took no notice), "and there are times when these things must be said. Candidly, I'm not happy about Lucille. I don't believe her—feeling for you is strong enough to bridge the gulf."

"Of the years?"

"And other disparities. After all, you live in quite different worlds, move in totally dissimilar society."

"True, O King." The Brinsleys might be as poor as church rats, but they had been landowners under the first Richard, and the first Tudor serfs hadn't been born at that time.

"Don't misunderstand me. Lucille is accustomed to a good deal of going about, travelling, living on rather a lavish scale."

"True again. But I shan't expect her to wash her own dishes. And as for going about, I understood that these days it was quite *démodé* for a lady to be seen in public with her husband. There are dancing partners fattened for no other purpose."

"That's mere quibbling, Brinsley, and you know it. Personally I'm entirely against a young girl marrying a man thirteen years her senior unless I'm very sure she's . . ."

"Passionately in love. Quite so. As far as age goes I think you overstress the point. What's the rule? That a man should marry a woman half his age plus seven—that's twenty-five. True, Lucille's two years below standard, but I think the very wide education she has received at your hands more than compensates for the two years. And I should say it's quite probable," he wound up coolly, "that the day will dawn when I shall be a very much richer person than my wife." In which he spoke the truth, though Rossiter didn't believe him.

"Anything else to offer?" he asked amiably, sipping green Chartreuse. "If Lucille wants to smash the engagement she'll tell me so herself."

"There's one more thing," answered Rossiter slowly. "Considering you're proposing to marry my ward within six weeks it seems to me manifestly

improper that you should allow your name to be coupled with that of a notorious woman like Mrs. Davenport."

Denis was taken off his guard. "Mrs. Davenport? What the devil . . .?"

"She may be an old acquaintance of yours. That's not my affair. But people are already talking. You've been seen driving together; you visit her flat. And it isn't fair to Lucille."

Denis' voice was icy with disgust as he said, "May I ask what excuse you have for this unwarrantable attack? What your suggestions imply I don't know . . ."

"My excuse must be my love for Lucille. I'd rather see her dead than know she was unhappy through you or any man. As for Mrs. Davenport, I suppose everyone knows her story. I'm not concerned with it; it's not my affair whether she did or did not poison her husband; but that kind of mud sticks; and it shan't stick to Lucille's skirts. Nor," he added, as Brinsley seemed about to interrupt him, "am I concerned with your relations with her fourteen years ago. Galahad is only a legend. But one shouldn't allow one's amours to have frayed edges."

Glancing at his guest he saw that he was terribly pale; he seemed obsessed by a momentary nervous excitement; one hand that he had thrust into his trouser pocket was opening and closing convulsively. He made a tremendous effort to control a passion of rage; then in a strangled sort of voice he said, "The fact that you're Lucille's guardian covers a multitude of insults. If it's any satisfaction to you

I don't expect to be seeing Mrs. Davenport again." And for the second time he smiled in that stiff peculiar manner that Dick had observed.

For the rest of the evening they talked impersonalities, parting early. Denis walked home to cool his raging blood, reaching the flat shortly after half-past ten. Mayes came to meet him in the hall.

"A gentleman telephoned about a quarter to nine, sir. Asked particularly to speak to you."

"Did he, Mayes? Thank Heaven you didn't tell him where I was. What did he want?"

"He's going to telephone to-morrow."

"Then spare me the rest. Get me some coffee, will you? Strong and black. Bring it up to my room as soon as it's ready."

He had meant to spend an hour wrestling with a provocative article in the new Scientific Review by Hepburn, but his thoughts were whirling like catherine wheels. He had found the evening extraordinarily difficult, and now he was paying the penalty for that outward courtesy towards his host. As he turned into his room he saw on the dressing-table the blue envelope, still sealed. With a short laugh he tore it across and across, and tossed it into the basket.

"That's the end of that," he muttered. "Now we must wait and see what the future brings. Come in, Mayes. Wait while I drink it, will you, and then switch off my light?"

CHAPTER IV

HELEN OF TROY

AT about eight o'clock that same night two men were strolling along the Embankment. The night was clear and the wind had dropped; the men were widely dissimilar in appearance, one being fair and slender and groomed almost to foppishness, while the second was shorter, stocky, broad-shouldered, with a forceful manner, a striking voice and a hard, handsome face. Both men seemed at leisure and talked idly as they walked.

"Whatever the sentimental press may babble about the ghosts on the Embankment," murmured Voisey lazily, "I find it a most restful spot." He looked thoughtfully over the parapet at the black shining water lapping with cunning, silent persistence at the walls; at the boats that moved idly on the face of the river, the gulls settled in a long white line for the night on the hull of some barge; at the delicate lines of wharf and crane etched against a clear deep-blue sky; at all the suggestion of power and strength momentarily hushed and slumberous. A lighted omnibus passed over Westminster Bridge, and there was a queer furtive footstep behind them as a woman of the night peered hopefully at their faces, seeking hire.

"I came precisely this same walk last week with

a fellow whose portrait I've been painting," returned Wyndham Grain, chuckling a little at the younger man's absorption. "He's a chap called Joseph Belton—you've heard the name. Belton's pies, Belton's sausages, Belton's brawn. You've eaten 'em a hundred times even if you don't recognise the title. He's a nice subject; when I'd finished with him he looked brawn and sausages; you could almost see them hidden beneath his waistcoat. That was the whole man; take away the sausages and he had no life. When he came to see it he was delighted. He said, 'That's just the impression I wanted you to give.' That man's an artist, and I take off my hat to him. I brought him down here and he stood for a long time looking straight in front of him, as you're doing now. Then he turned to me and said in an awed voice, 'And to think that for generations all that magnificent advertising space was going and nobody used it.' "

"You have such soulless friends," protested Voisey dispassionately.

"Not at all. I painted a woman the other day, the Duchess of B—— Know her? But I daresay you know her reputation, a painted vicious lying old harridan. I put her down just as I saw her; all artists have their limitations and that is mine. I can't produce a passable portrait with all the uncharitable lines painted out. I've tried, because starving isn't pleasant. I speak from experience. Of course, the perfect portrait-painter would have omitted the ugly lines, but I can't do it. When she saw it she swore till my blood ran cold. I suppose she was justified. She was seeing for the first time

the horrible vulture thing she had become. She wouldn't buy it. Said it was a libel. That doesn't worry me at all. I'm going to exhibit it in France in the early spring. Lamarche has seen it; he knows a man who'll give me twenty per cent. more than I asked the harridan. I've called it simply 'The Duchess.' "

"There'll be trouble over that, Grain. No woman would let the matter rest there."

"No doubt you're right. But why didn't the old hag give me my price without quibbling? She has thousands she'll never miss. As it is, she's merely secured herself a far greater publicity. People will ferret out the likeness. But I must say I enjoyed the work. I don't like painting women as a rule. The young ones rush from one thing to another without stopping for breath with the result that they're far too shallow to be connoisseurs of anything. I do like a woman to be a connoisseur, if it's only of vice. Like the old Duchess. There's nothing to paint in most women nowadays but a scrap of powdered flesh and a streak of lipstick. They don't live; they experiment and haven't the patience to stop and see the results of these experiments. There's one woman, though, I should like to have a shy at. That's that extraordinary woman who created such a sensation at Rossiter's damnably dull dinner. Mrs. Davenport."

"Yes, she's an interesting woman if you can go by looks."

"A woman who's lived. She's not a machine, she's a full-blooded human creature. I shouldn't be in the least surprised to hear that she did murder her hus-

band. There was a good deal of scepticism in Rocqueville at the time of the trial. A man I know who was staying there gave me the unofficial reports. The old Colonel was a bit of a rip, though not so bad as she made out. It was six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, I should suppose. She ran him up some pretty bills, I warn you."

"You can run a man up bills without murdering him," Voisey pointed out sarcastically.

"Most noble Brutus! True. But only a brilliant lawyer would have got her off."

"Do you know her?"

"No. I don't call sitting at the same table—and *mon Dieu!* what a table—knowing a woman. But I'm going to. I'm going to paint her. *The Last of the Englishwomen.* There's nothing of the higher intelligence about her; she doesn't want to rule the universe by wielding the vote. She's a woman who's unthinkable apart from a man. My dear fellow, don't be squeamish. I suppose you're regarding her as an angel of light brutally treated. Old Colonel Courcy may have had his harem, but she wasn't unattended in consequence. And do you suppose she's living here like a Sunday School teacher? Not she. And quite right. Waste is the prime sin of creation, and a woman like that has no right to waste herself. There isn't much about men she doesn't know. You're not acquainted with her by any chance?"

"I know her to a certain extent," admitted Voisey, still rather stiff and forbidding.

The painter clapped a hand enthusiastically upon his shoulder. "Good lad! We'll go along now and see if she's in."

"You're not afraid she may object to our butting in upon her at this hour of the night?"

"Only if she's got another visitor. We'll telephone if you like."

But Voisey said No, he didn't think they need do that.

"Then, if you're so sure of a welcome, come on. It's only dinner-time. And if she is alone she'll be delighted to see us. She's a woman, I tell you, not a hat-stand in kilts like most of 'em nowadays."

Without further discussion they hailed a taxi and drove to Pontifex Mansions, Grain talking most of the way of the magnificent portrait he was going to do.

"I suppose you realise it'll make her more noticeable than ever," put in his companion drily.

The painter moved his hands in a splendid gesture. "Notoriety! People will forget Colonel Courcy ever existed. All they will remember of her is that she was the woman on whom Wyndham Grain expended his genius."

The porter had gone to dinner when they reached the Mansions, and they met no one on their way up to the second floor. Voisey pressed the bell and they waited. Nothing happened.

"Maid out perhaps," suggested the artist.

"She doesn't keep a maid," returned Voisey caught unawares. "The charwoman does cleaning from time to time."

"Then, if she's at home, she'll answer the door herself?"

"Have to."

"Suppose, after all, she has got a guest? You'd been wiser to telephone."

Voisey stooped and peered through the letter-flap. Then he straightened himself and shook his head. "There's no light in the living-room," he observed. "You can see it clearly under the door when it's switched on."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"Clear out presumably. She can't be in."

"Perhaps she's merely day-dreaming. Why not make sure?"

Voisey stared at him in perplexity. "Make sure? How on earth . . .?"

"I'm positive you have a latch-key. Why not use it?"

Voisey reddened to the roots of his hair, while the older man regarded him with open amusement. "Bah, my friend, don't blush in that girlish fashion. I'm not a young miss in a school-room. I know a little of my world. You're always hungry for fresh experience—necessary to your career as a writer. And so is Helen Davenport. Necessary to her career as a woman."

Voisey knocked and rang once more, then felt in his pocket for the key. As he produced it, however, Grain uttered a low exclamation. "Hold up! There's no need for that thing. The door's on the latch." He put out one hand and pushed the door open, and both men stepped into the tiny square lobby that served the tenant as a hall.

"Queer, that," exclaimed the novelist.

"Perhaps," agreed his companion cryptically. "She wasn't expecting you by any chance?"

"No."

"Positive?"

"Absolutely sure."

"Then it stands to reason she was expecting someone else, someone who wasn't fortunate enough to possess a latch-key, and she left the door open on his account."

"You're drunk," said Voisey contemptuously. "If there was someone here there'd be a light somewhere in the flat. Well, you can see there isn't. None of the doors here quite reach the ground. If you had to sit in the direct line of one for an hour you'd know what a draught was."

"As you've learned?"

Voisey let that pass. "Then obviously we should see the light. Isn't that clear?"

"As dawn."

"And we don't. Therefore there's no one in the flat."

"And the door is left open—why?"

"An oversight I should think. Or else she's just run down to speak to someone else on the floor below."

"Is she acquainted with any of the other tenants?"

"I haven't asked to see her address book. But I should think it's probable."

"In that case she no doubt expects to be back within a minute or two. As we've come so far at such an inconvenient hour I think we should be justified in staying for a few minutes in anticipation of her return. You know her better than I can hope to. What do you think?"

Voisey hesitated. At last he said, "You wait here an instant, will you? I'll just reconnoitre." He left Grain in the centre of the diminutive hall, looking at the twin pictures that hung on either wall. "Twixt Love and Duty" and "The Day of Reckoning"—large handsome prints in old-fashioned light ash frames.

"Not bad," murmured Grain appraisingly. "I wonder what man gave her those." For he was of the type that does not believe any woman would spend money she has had to earn on such things. Voisey meanwhile opened a door almost directly facing them and went in quietly. Grain saw the light stream under the aperture and awaited his summons. He had the gift of marvellous patience and set himself to think of the most advantageous pose for this superb creature upon his canvas. He was still pondering when he heard Voisey's voice —shocked and dreadful.

"Oh, my God! Grain, quick."

The artist pushed open the door and went in. The small room seemed a little disturbed as though someone very boisterous had invaded it. The cloth on the table was awry, a vase of flowers had been knocked over, and the water spilt on the carpet; a drawer, with the key still in it, stood half-open. A single glance warned Grain that the lock had been smashed. A chair in which Helen Davenport had presumably been sitting when she was interrupted was pushed back from the table, and a pen lay on the floor as if it had rolled there when its wielder flung it down in a gust of fury. The room was not empty; it had not been empty all the time the pair

of them had stood ringing and knocking on the step; Helen Davenport was there; she lay strangled on the sofa, as if she had been flung there by some gigantic brutal hand; her body from the waist to the feet lay on the brown velvet couch, but her head and one arm dragged almost to the floor. The other arm lay along her side, with the hand clenched. The hair was a little disarranged but not so much as Grain would have expected in the circumstances; clearly she had been taken unawares, without an instant to prepare herself for struggle; her dress was likewise a little dishevelled; there was no need to ask how she was or what had happened to her. She was dead, and the method of her death was indisputable. The dreadful protruding eyes, the swollen blackened tongue in the open mouth told the foul story as clearly as the ominous marks on her long and lovely throat.

"My God!" muttered Voisey again, turning away from that appalling sight, "who did that?"

Grain took a white silk handkerchief from the sleeve of his coat and covered up the face. It troubled him that at the last she should lie in that hideous and disfiguring attitude; for he was an artist before he was a man, and it shocked him that she who in life had been dignified and even majestic should be open to the ridicule and compassion of the multitude in her death. What she had or had not done did not matter to him in any degree; he considered that to such a woman her personality was its own excuse. Now, answering Voisey's question, he said slowly, "I should say the gentleman for whom that door was left open. And indirectly yourself."

"I? Are you utterly mad, Grain?"

"Oh, pull together, my dear fellow, and put two and two together as well. Are you responsible for the rent of this flat? No? Then probably the murderer is the gentleman who is. Why he shouldn't have a latch-key I can't conceive; but perhaps he's lost it. Or he has a curious wife who might ask awkward questions. But when that gentleman discovered your existence and the existence of the odd latch-key I should suppose that his feelings were too much for him."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, talk like a human being," exclaimed Voisey desperately. "Here's a woman murdered, and all you can think of is some abstruse theory as to motive."

"They're rather important," put in Grain mildly. "It's obviously a crime of passion. Otherwise strangulation wouldn't be the method. It's a horrible way of killing, as well as the ugliest there is. And yet—I'm not surprised. Something of this sort was inevitable. That type of woman doesn't die peacefully in her bed. Violence takes most of them." He was philosophizing as if he were merely reading some report in a paper. The terrible presence of the dead woman appeared to leave his nerves quite unruffled.

"I wonder how long she's been dead," he went on, stooping over the body. "I suppose we ought to get hold of a doctor."

"We ought to get hold of the police. The telephone's in the hall."

As he moved towards it Grain's eye began to make a quick but masterly survey of the room. By

the time Voisey was back he had come to several conclusions.

"Is there another living-room in this flat?"

"No."

"Then clearly she was killed before dinner. There's no cloth on the table. I wonder if the kitchen would tell us anything."

But there was nothing alight in the kitchen; cooking was done on a gas stove, and this was perfectly cold and clean. Nor were there any utensils stacked in the sink or on the dresser.

"I suppose there's no way of guessing whether it was before or after tea. She might have been expecting someone to tea . . ." There was a gas-fire in this room also, with a small standing gas-ring attachment. On the ring was a small copper kettle, which Grain lifted. "Nearly empty. Probably that's the remains of her tea-kettle. Did she usually dress for dinner when she was alone?"

"I—don't know. If she was alone . . ."

"You weren't there? Exactly. Well, you can't help much. By the way, I should dispossess yourself of the latch-key before the police come. They might ask awkward questions. Hullo, look at this!" The fireplace had been tiled in brown, and in one corner was a heap of fresh ashes. "Left by the murderer I don't doubt. Wonder what they are. Papers—a handkerchief stained with blood—where would the blood come from though? Oh well, that's a job for the police. Horrible to think that anything so beautiful can look like that at the last. I've always loathed the idea of the conquering worm, but I begin to think he's a merciful dispensation of Provi-

dence. Anything that can destroy that horror. Hullo, there's your man, I fancy."

They had left the front door unlatched, and the police officer came straight into the room, guided by the light. He was a tall well-set-up man named Jamieson, with a brisk manner and slow speech. He glanced once at the body, then back at the two men.

"Are you the tenants of the flat?"

Grain did most of the answering. "No. This lady is the tenant. We merely came in to see her."

"By appointment?"

"No. As a matter of fact I don't know her at all. Mr. Voisey is a friend of hers and he offered to introduce me. My name is Wyndham Grain and I was anxious to paint her portrait. This is Mr. Gilbert Voisey, the writer."

"You have only just arrived?"

"We telephoned immediately we found the body."

"Is there anyone else in the flat?"

"I don't think so. I understand that Mrs. Davenport didn't keep a maid."

"Then how did you get in?"

"The door was on the latch for some reason."

"That made you suspicious?"

"Hardly suspicious. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the lady had gone down to see some other tenant of the mansions. Or possibly the porter."

"I saw no porter when I came in."

"He's probably at supper. Porters usually are, except in the morning when they're at breakfast. Shall I reconnoitre for you?"

Jamieson shook his head. "Thanks. I have a man

outside. Martin." A constable came out of the small lobby where he was waiting for instructions. "Go down and find the porter and bring him up to me. Also find out from him if there is a doctor on the premises, and if not get the name of the nearest and telephone to him. Now, gentlemen, I should like you to tell me all you know about the deceased. I think Mr. Voisey knew her intimately?" He glanced coolly and with assurance at the younger man, who immediately looked a little shaken.

"Hardly that," he denied quickly.

"Unusually well, I think," pressed Jamieson inexorably. "Otherwise you would scarcely have invaded her flat."

"Invaded?"

"Yes. It's a little unusual, if you get no reply, to enter an apparently empty flat unless you know the owner extremely well. It is scarcely a thing a comparative stranger would do."

"Mr. Voisey entered at my urging," cut in Grain, with an inflection of contempt for his young companion. "I am particularly anxious—I should say, was particularly anxious to paint Mrs. Davenport, and as I am going north in a day or two I begged him to strain a point in my favour." His arrogant expression said that a visit from him at any time was in the nature of a favour.

Voisey pulled himself together and began to answer the inspector's question. "I'm afraid I can't help you very much. I met Mrs. Davenport—Mrs. Helen Davenport, to give her full name—at a dinner-party at the house of Mr. Julian Rossiter of 119 Hyde Park Corner about two months ago. She

was a stranger to most of us, but I met her by chance the following week and we drifted into conversation. She was greatly interested in literature, and in particular in French literature, having lived for several years abroad. I used to come and see her occasionally and lend her books. She has a book of mine now. I daresay it will be somewhere in her shelves."

"You know nothing of her past life, nothing that might explain this?"

Voisey hesitated and exchanged a look with his companion. Jamieson intercepted that and said quietly, "All this information is bound to come out both at the inquest and the trial. It would be simpler if you would tell me all you know now."

"He's quite right, Voisey," cut in Wyndham Grain. "You can't keep this sort of thing secret."

"As a matter of fact, it isn't particularly secret now. Mrs. Davenport's real name was Mrs. Helen Courcy; she was the widow of Colonel Hilary Courcy who died from arsenical poisoning abroad fourteen years ago. Mrs. Courcy was tried for his murder and acquitted. That's all I know."

"She told you this?"

"Oh Lord, no. But it's current gossip. I don't answer for the truth of the details but I think there's undoubtedly something in it. He appears to have been a bit of a blackguard. Whether some of his relatives discovered where she was . . ."

"They've waited a long time," suggested the Inspector drily. He went across to the table where the vase had been upset, and dabbled his fingers on the damp carpet. "Two or three hours old," he ob-

served. "And the time now . . ." He glanced at the mantelpiece and then frowned. "A quarter past nine? That's impossible." He pulled out a silver Waterbury. "I thought so. A quarter to." Ladies, he had discovered, often had a whim of keeping their clocks fast, presumably themselves best knowing why.

He came back to the body, and took the silk handkerchief in his hand. "Does this belong to either of you gentlemen?"

"Mine," returned Grain laconically. "It seemed —better." He put the handkerchief back in his sleeve as the inspector silently handed it to him. Then the constable returned with the porter and the information that a doctor would be round within five minutes. There was none on the premises and the nearest had been out. He had, therefore, telephoned to a man living in the next square, a man called Percival Eardley.

"Right, Martin. Wait outside, will you, and stop anyone coming into the flat."

The porter was a slow elderly man with pale blue eyes and unkempt grey hair. Jamieson recognised the status of the flats the moment he set eyes on the fellow.

"I don't think I need detain either of you gentlemen," Jamieson said, turning to Grain and Voisey. "If you will let me have your addresses. Thank you. I have the address of Mr. Rossiter. I should warn you that you will probably be required to attend the inquest. Good evening."

He turned back to the porter as the other two went down the stairs.

"What's your name?" he asked curtly, standing flush in front of the body.

"Marchant, sir." The old man strained furtively this way and that to see what all the excitement was about.

"What are your hours, Marchant?"

"Hours, sir? Well, from about eight in the morning till eleven at night."

"You're on duty all that time?"

"More or less, sir."

"Do you live on the premises?"

"Yes, sir. With me wife and daughter. We live in the basement."

"I see. And when you start work at eight . . .?"

"There's all the polishing to do and the steps and the stairs."

"Doesn't your wife have anything to do with that?"

"Sometimes, sir. But it's me that's responsible."

"I see. But you don't have breakfast before eight?"

"Oh no, sir. 'Bout half-pars eight I 'as me breakfast."

"And come on work about nine?"

"About that, sir."

"And all the rest of the day until eleven at night?"

"Except for meals, sir."

"You were having a meal when I arrived, perhaps?"

"Supper, sir."

"I see. What time do you go to supper?"

"It just depends, sir."

"For instance, what time did you go to supper to-night?"

"I couldn't say exactly, sir. About eight."

"Those two men who have just gone said they didn't see any signs of you when they arrived; they would come about eight-thirty, I suppose. Did you see them come?"

"N-no, can't say as 'ow I did, sir."

"Then you'd gone by then?"

"I usually goes at eight," quavered the old man, groping after dignity.

"And how long do you generally take for supper?"

"I generally allow arf-an-hour, sir."

"But to-day you were longer?"

Marchant broke out passionately, "I've 'ad rheumatism in me back this last month somethink crool, comes of sitting in the 'all in all them draughts. And 'ow am I to know if anyone's coming 'oo'll want me?"

"Aren't you often wanted, Marchant?"

"What for, sir? If they wants to know 'oo lives in the flats there's a board; if they wants to know if they's in or out, there's a board; if that ain't enough for 'em they wouldn't take my word for it; they'll go upstairs and find out for 'emselves."

"So your hours of duty are pretty elastic?"

"You might say that, sir."

"So that it would be possible for a good many people to come and go and you not see them?"

The old man's nervousness broke bounds. "What is it, sir? A burglary? Cross me 'eart, I don't know nothink about it."

"I didn't suppose you would. If you spend half your days with Mrs. Marchant in the basement how can you expect to be of any use to us?"

"Is it a burglary then?"

"No," said Jamieson curtly. "It isn't. It's murder."

Marchant started back, ashy with terror, the pale blue eyes starting, the lower jaw dropped, the whole of his face trembling; "Gawd A'mighty. Not—not Mrs. Davenport. Not 'er."

"Why not?"

"She was such a nice lady. There's nobody could want to murder 'er."

"Well, perhaps she's been murdered by somebody who didn't want to murder her. Pull yourself together. I want your evidence."

"I—I ain't got no evidence." The voice was shrill and terrified.

"Now try and remember straight. What time did you come back from lunch to-day?"

"To-day? Lemme see. Two, say."

"And what time did you go to tea? As near to the minute as possible, please."

"Say—about four."

"And you returned? You'll have to give this evidence on oath later, so you'd better make the two accounts tally."

"Say—five, sir."

"You're sure it was five. Would Mrs. Marchant remember?"

Marchant looked dubious for an instant, then blurted out, "Well, sir, to tell you the truth I 'aven't been quite so well lately, all this damp weather and

the draughts in the 'all. Fair wicked them draughts are. I didn't say nothing about it in case I was to lose me job. But I come on all over queer sometimes, and this afternoon I lay down on me bed for a bit."

"From lunch time onward?" Jamieson's grey eyes spared him nothing.

"I come up once or twice in case there was anythink—a telegram or somethink."

"What times did you come up?"

"Once about half-pars-three and once about half-pars-five."

"You're sure of your times?"

"Yes, sir." His voice was eager.

"Did you see anybody either time?"

"I see young Mrs. Temperley the second time. First time there was no one."

"Where does Mrs. Temperley live?"

"On the ground-floor, sir. She and 'er 'usband. She does typewriting all day and 'e's somethink in a publishers' office. 'Awks books or somethink."

"Is he home yet?"

" 'E's up in the Midlands, I think she said, for a week."

"And she's in her flat alone?"

"She's got a sister or someone staying with her."

"I see. Now, tell me this. Did Mrs. Davenport have many visitors to your knowledge?"

"She 'ad a few, of course, like any lady would."

"Any men?"

"One or two, I believe."

"Did you notice the two men who were here when you came in?"

Marchant hesitated. "Y-yes, sir."

"Had you ever seen either of them in these flats before? Had you seen the elder of the two before?"

Marchant looked deeply troubled. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he hadn't made a very favourable impression on the inspector, and he didn't want any mention of his casual method of pursuing his duties to come to the ears of his employers. Like the unknown soldier who smote King Ahab in the joints of his harness, he drew a bow at a venture. "Yes, sir, I think so."

"Thinking won't do. Do you or don't you?"

The porter plunged desperately. "It's either 'im or 'is twin brother, sir."

"Then I'm afraid it's his twin brother. I understand from Mr. Grain that he's never been inside these flats before."

Marchant wilted. "Well, sir, I'm sure I didn't know."

"In the circumstance I can hardly put you in the witness-box. I don't want to give you the chance of hanging an innocent man."

Marchant plucked up a new desperate courage. "There's one gentleman I should know again, a foreign gentleman."

"Do you mean coloured?" questioned Jamieson sharply, for he had some knowledge of the Marchant type.

"No, sir. As white as you or me. But 'e talked funny-like. An' 'e always spoke of Mrs. Davenport as Madame. Come quite orfen 'e did."

"For a long time?"

"Since Mrs. Davenport took 'er flat here."

"How long ago is that?"

" 'Bout three months."

"Now describe this man as carefully as possible. Had he dark hair or fair?"

"Dark. Quite black it looked. And a little bald on the top. And a beard, a little pointed one sitting well out from 'is chin. A civil-spoken gentleman."

"And he came often?"

"Twice in a week sometimes."

"You mean you saw him twice a week?"

"That's right, sir."

"And there are all the other times when you didn't see him?"

Marchant sounded indignant. "A man 'as to eat, sir, to live."

"I'm not disputing it. Did you ever hear this man's name?"

"No, sir. But 'e was French, I think. We once 'ad a French young lady staying 'ere and she talked just the same way."

"You don't know where he lived? Did he ever speak to you?"

"No, I don't know that. No, 'e didn't speak except to say is Madame in?"

"When did he last come?"

" 'Bout a week ago."

"What time of day used he to come?"

"Sometimes in the arternoon; sometimes at night. But mostly in the arternoon."

"I see. You'd know him again?"

"Oh yes, sir. Know 'is voice."

Jamieson rubbed his chin thoughtfully, "We may ask you to identify him later. Did you see anyone

come up to this flat this afternoon? But of course you couldn't."

"No, sir," agreed the little man humbly.

"Well, it's a pity but it can't be helped. Who has the flat below?"

"Mrs. Summers and Miss Herrick, sir."

"Are they in during the day?"

"Mrs. Summers is in a manicure shop, I believe. I don't know about Miss Herrick, but they're both of 'em out all day. They usually gets back about six."

"I see. Of course you don't know if they're back yet, because you've been up here for the past twenty minutes. You can go down now, and please don't talk more about the affair than you can help. I don't want the whole neighbourhood naming the criminal within the next hour. Don't go out as I may need you again. Is that the doctor, Martin? Bring him in."

Marchant disappeared a little reluctantly; he would have liked to stay and see what happened; as it was he didn't even know how the unfortunate lady had died. "He'll go down and tell his wife her throat was cut from ear to ear, and that the room is swimming in blood," reflected the inspector, who had some knowledge of the type. "But for all his ghoulishness I don't think we need torment him with a picture of the real thing. Dr. Eardley?" he added aloud as two men entered the room.

The new-comer was a young man who thought it became professional dignity to show neither surprise nor horror.

"The divisional surgeon was called away unexpectedly this afternoon," Jamieson explained. "He'll

be back to-morrow, but in the meantime the formality of a medical opinion must be gone through."

Eardley bent over the dreadful swollen face. "I don't think there's much doubt," he murmured. And as he began his examination Jamieson's thoughts went back to the couple who had just left the flat. They, in point of fact, were at that moment separating.

"A pity," observed Grain regretfully, "you didn't introduce me a week ago. Now I shall never paint her. Did you leave the latch-key after all?"

"Yes. On the mantelpiece where she herself might have put it. I'm not particularly anxious to figure in a scandal with a lady of her history."

"There's an axiom," scowled the painter, and his voice was unexpectedly brusque, "about meeting your bills. Taxi!" He waved his stick and was out of sight before the young man realised his intention. When he did he merely sighed. And then, because he could be personally insensitive despite the delicacy of his work, he added ruefully, "He might have offered me a lift."

CHAPTER V

THE CLUE OF ARIADNE

EARDLEY'S examination of the body was a brief affair. Cause of death was dreadfully apparent. Nevertheless Jamieson was taking no chances.

"Strangulation?" he questioned.

Eardley allowed himself to be a thought sarcastic. "Presumably."

"We find it a safe rule, Dr. Eardley, never to presume. There might be medical evidence to show that Mrs. Davenport suffered from syncope and died of shock before she was throttled. She might have been poisoned . . ."

"In her own flat?"

"There are cases on record."

"Then why go to the pains of strangling her afterwards?"

"She may have recognised, too late, the murderer's intentions. It would, of course, be highly important to him that no scream or shriek should betray him. There are various theories, all of them unlikely but not impossible. But in this case you can certify the cause of death as strangulation?" . .

"I can't swear there's no poison in the body, though I regard it as highly unlikely. But only a post-

mortem examination of the organs can tell you that."

"There's no bruising, nothing to indicate a blow before strangulation?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Thank you. Of course, the body will be the subject of a report from the divisional surgeon tomorrow."

"You'll take it to the mortuary?"

"Afterwards. I have your card? Thank you. How long do you suppose the deceased has been dead?"

"Roughly, four hours. Of course this may be a case where individual minutes are of value."

"Quite possibly." He watched the doctor to the door, where Martin showed him off the premises. Then he said, "Lock the front door, Martin, and if there's a bolt draw that. Then we'll lock this door too. We don't want that old man stealing up to find out what's going on. Ready?"

Death by strangulation argues two points; one, that it is unpremeditated, since it is a death that is of all others the most horrible; the second point is that its virtue lies in leaving no trace beyond the obvious assertion that the murderer has a good deal of muscular strength; but, as Jamieson had proved, a man or even a woman keyed up to a certain pitch of fury develops a kind of supernatural strength and is, in that state of mind, capable of muscular acts that are normally absolutely impossible. The carpet in Mrs. Davenport's room revealed nothing; it was a hard carpet with little surface, and in any case the feet of the various men who had entered the room since the murder would nullify any evidence he might

hope to deduce therefrom. He next turned his attention to the pile of ash in the fireplace. Without offering to touch it he crouched on hands and knees peering all round the heap and then gently loosened the ash and examined it; Still without comment he rose and glanced again round the room. On the cream-coloured window-sill was an inexpensive cigarette-tray in which were the ends of four cigarettes and three matches. The cigarettes for the moment he ignored; looking keenly at the matches he shook his head and came back to the fireplace.

"It's queer, Martin, that with all that ash there should be no sign of the match that kindled the fire."

"If it was burned, sir . . ."

"Even so, the ghost of the match remains like an accusing spectre. And there were matches just above the murderer's head. No, those in the tray have obviously been used to light the cigarettes; they'd have been burned much lower for a conflagration like this. It seems fairly clear that whoever it is, is accustomed to a pipe-lighter. That sounds like a man, and in any case I doubt whether death by strangling has ever been accomplished single-handed by a woman, not in this country at all events. Now for the ash, it comes, obviously, from fairly good letter-paper; there isn't a shred left to give us evidence. I wonder if there are any finger-marks on the tiling." But there were none. Either the murderer had worn gloves or he had taken the precaution to wipe the tiles with a handkerchief before taking his departure. Jamieson left the fireplace and turned his attention to the small bureau that stood against one of the walls.

Here he found a small brass inkstand, a penholder of purple wood, a penwiper, two pencils, some soft red rubber, a small file of bills, receipts and inconsiderable papers, a box of notepaper and a blotter. "Of course," he observed meditatively, "that ash may be the remainder of letters written by the lady herself. Let's try." He took a sheet from the writing-pad and burned it carefully. Then he compared the ash with that still in the fireplace. It was obvious that they were dissimilar. The paper on the table was of better quality and the ash was a little stiffer. "Or she may have burned them herself; they may have been letters that it would be indiscreet to retain; they were something fairly important or they'd have found their way into the basket." He lifted a gilt paper-basket from the side of the bureau and glanced at the torn papers it contained. These seemed chiefly advertisements, circulars and a note or two she had probably made herself. He pieced them together meticulously but they told him nothing. He came back to the blotter. This he examined sheet by sheet; presently he paused as various words or letters became legible. Holding a small mirror above them he drew a pencil from his pocket and began to jot them down. They were few and mysterious.

... . .I h... show
h.. th..e lette.s.....have
on ...ore.....Luci.le

Nothing else was decipherable, but at the head of the sheet he found a date—December 6th. "Yesterday," he thought, but there was nothing to prove

that it referred to the rest of the words. which might just as easily have been penned a week earlier. Jamieson tried to make some sense out of them.

I have shown him (or her) these letters
I shall show him (or her) these letters.

That was more likely, in view of what followed.

(You) have one more (chance)

Then a reference to someone called Lucille. It was all very baffling.

"I wonder who Lucille can be. Apparently Mrs. Davenport is writing to someone, a man I should say, telling him she will show the letters (to Lucille?) but that he has one more chance. Blackmail of some sort in money or kind. Supposing the date does apply to the letter he would presumably get it this morning. He comes here, presumably as she asks him, and she threatens him with certain letters. That's clear, but in the circumstances it would be more reasonable for him to be threatening her. Or perhaps he had some part in poisoning the Colonel fourteen years ago. Or possibly it's nothing to do with the Colonel at all. She holds Lucille over his head. Or perhaps I'm all wrong, and Lucille is a maid, only she hasn't got a maid. Possibly she's writing to a woman who's got some guilty secret from her husband. You can put almost any construction on a fragment like that. I wonder if there's anything else."

He began to search the drawers of the bureau, beginning with the top one that had the broken lock.

Here he found a really valuable clue. For here were the ominous three letters Helen Davenport had shown to Denis, and with them a fourth on a narrow strip of paper that had obviously arrived very recently indeed. "Forty-eight hours." That was all. Jamieson examined all the letters with a meticulousness that even Martin, who was accustomed to his methods, found a little tiresome. But even a powerful lens revealed nothing. The paper used was pale grey with a water mark of a lion rampant. Such writing-paper was sold by the thousand in pads of various sizes, and the detective did not think he was likely to gain very much help from that. It did seem to him, however, that it might be possible to trace Mlle. Lecoq, and in some way extort from her an admission as to the name of her accomplice in blackmail. Always supposing she was actually a party to the plot. Jamieson was quite shrewd enough to realise that it was possible for the writer of the letters to have had no actual communication with the woman, but was merely using her name for his own ends. That he knew where she was to be found and could produce her, if necessary, might reasonably be assumed, though at the moment it didn't seem to matter much. Meanwhile, a cable should be sent to the Sûreté in Paris asking for full details by return of the Courcy trial, and all possible information regarding Mlle. Lecoq. If she had been employed by Mrs. Davenport her name would be known. If not, she was clearly connected in some way with the Courcys and it should be possible to trace her.

Leaving the bureau Jamieson came and stood by the dead woman and standing there a thought seemed to strike him. "It isn't usual," he reflected aloud, "if you're attacked in this way to clench the fists; you'd be more inclined to keep your hands free trying to escape from your enemy. But I see one hand is doubled up fiercely. I wonder . . ." He stooped. *Rigor mortis* had already set in, and it was all he and Martin could do to open the closed hand. When they had done so Jamieson found himself staring at something so fine and small that it might easily have escaped observation. He laid it on the palm of his own hand. Three black hairs twisted together like a fairy rope, long hair, coarser than is usually found on the human head. He carried it over to the window, examined it more carefully yet, took a lens from his pocket and studied it.

"Well?" he asked, turning suddenly to Martin.

"The black-bearded visitor," said Martin promptly. "That hair's too coarse for anything but a beard."

"That's very neat, I admit. But I'm by no means sure that this is, in fact, human hair. I can't tell with this small lens; it'll have to go under the microscope, and I'll get Davidson's opinion, but I've a shrewd suspicion that it's horse hair. You see what that implies?"

"A disguise. But why?"

"You heard what the porter said? That the black-bearded gentleman paid frequent calls. He may have had a wife, or he may have had excellent reasons for not wishing his name to be coupled with

a woman whose story apparently was well-known. Also you'll remember the porter saying that the visits were chiefly in the afternoon. That points to a married man; bachelors' evenings are, as a rule, at their own disposal, but married men have less liberty of action. The policy of the beard is clear enough, if a little over-scrupulous. Probably the gentleman is nervous. He couldn't guess in the first place that the affair was going to end in murder, and therefore wouldn't think of his disguise proving a boomerang. I don't suppose he ever expected anyone to question the authenticity of the beard; but it's extraordinarily hard to get beards made from human hair; women's as a rule is too fine to be suitable, and men's isn't sufficiently long. This is an extremely good specimen, but I think it'll hang its owner after all. Now we're faced with three factors—the black-mailer, the lover and the murderer. Two of those may be synonymous—in fact, it's almost safe to assume that the lover and the murderer are. Because it isn't customary to pull a handful of hair out of a man's beard when you say good-bye, and it isn't usual to put on a disguise and visit a widow twice a week without some very intimate knowledge of her. It's just possible that the blackmailer may be identified with the other two, but highly improbable. If he is the same man he's much more likely to put his point in person; he chooses to remain anonymous; and in any case a blackmailer doesn't call so frequently as that. Unless, of course, he's blackmailing her secretly. But that position is scarcely possible; he knows she's practically

penniless. I think we may dismiss that theory. Next, of course, comes the question of the lover's identity. Again, it's conceivable, but extremely improbable, that he has some connection with the death of Colonel Courcy. I should scarcely imagine that any such affair would stand the wear and tear of fourteen years. Particularly as we have just had evidence that she contracts these—relationships—impulsively."

"Do you mean Gilbert Voisey?" asked Martin in a doubtful tone.

"Of course. Can you imagine any man calling on a woman and deliberately entering what he conceives to be her empty flat unless she's given him some very powerful right to do such a thing? It's tantamount to house-breaking. And as they only met two months ago they haven't paused much for consideration. Besides, he'd just told Grain that she didn't keep a maid. He wouldn't know that unless they were intimate. As to motive, I should say jealousy undoubtedly. Probably the black-bearded man found out about Voisey—or there may be others."

"And the blackmailer?"

"As to him we must reserve judgment for the time being. The mention of Mlle. Lecoq seems to suggest some kind of relationship. Possibly a husband or a brother, someone sufficiently intimate to have kept in touch with her movements. Or someone who supported the maid at one time and got her confidence."

"As to what?"

"There again we have to mark time. Some un-

disclosed evidence, very likely, that the lady would prevent at all costs from being generally known. I should say it's undoubtedly something to do with Colonel Courcy's murder, unless there have been other similar scandals since. But that again is most unlikely. We can't do much until we've seen some of her acquaintances and tried to get a little information from them. And none of them is likely to know about the blackmail—bar one."

"The man who levies it?"

"Him, of course. But the other person—man or woman—to whom she has turned for help. She wouldn't sit tight under those threats. Besides, we have evidence that she hasn't. Someone called Lucille is mixed up in this. Now we'll examine the typewritten pages more closely."

He laid them out on the table and bent over them. There were certain marked characteristics. A twisted 'h,' a tendency of the 's' and 't' to overtype; in particular a 'd' smaller than the other letters.

"That's been replaced, and the fool's put on élite instead of pica," Jamieson observed. "That would mark the machine among a thousand. All the same, it's hardly feasible to go all round England searching for the machine, and to let the public get wind of its peculiarities will be to put our man on guard, and very likely he'd contrive to get rid of it before we'd tracked him. No, I think that must wait. Where's the telephone?"

"In the hall, sir"

"And a directory or personal guide?"

"I saw a directory."

"Well, perhaps she's kept a list of her most frequent callers." He went out into the lobby, and Martin followed him. But there was neither guide hanging on the wall nor anything in the directory itself to give him the slightest clue. He had hoped that possibly she would have filled in the blank page at the beginning of the book or at all events have marked some of the numbers. But he could trace nothing. As he put the volume back on a bracket, however, something caught his vigilant eye, something that seemed unimportant enough but upon which the whole case was destined to hinge. It was crumpled under the edge of the blue velvet portière, a scrap of paper torn from the pad attached to the telephone, used and flung away. Carefully he unfolded it. It was the record of a number—Kensington 198765.

"Is that her writing?" He went back to the bureau, but though he did compare the figures with those of an account book he had found in another drawer it was not very satisfactory. It would have been impossible, even for a handwriting expert, to be certain that the figures had been written by the same hand; but, as Jamieson knew, when you are setting down a telephone number in a hurry, holding the earpiece with the other hand, figures are likely to become uncharacteristic. All the same, it was undoubtedly a clue. He lifted the receiver himself.

"Enquiries, please."

After a long wait he got connected. "Scotland Yard speaking. I want the name of Kensington 198765."

There was another pause. Then the squeaky voice said, "Sir Denis Brinsley. It's a laboratory, I believe."

Jamieson rang off. That piece of information cleared up many doubtful points. "Lucille" was obvious now. He knew that Brinsley was engaged to marry a Miss Lucille Tudor. Apparently this Mrs. Davenport had been threatening him with information that might cancel the match. Jamieson was sorry her trial had not taken place in England, when he could immediately have turned up the record. As it was, he would have to wait until the requisite information came from abroad. He telephoned the laboratory from the flat in Pontifex Mansions, but, as he had expected, got no reply. He then turned up the scientist's private address and rang up the flat in Notting Hill Gate. Mayes answered him.

"Sir Denis is out, sir."

"Where can I get him?"

Mayes, in whom caution was inbred, returned, "I couldn't say exactly, sir. He's out dining somewhere."

"Probably with the girl," Jamieson reflected. "You're expecting him back to-night?"

"Yes, sir. He said he wouldn't be late."

Jamieson decided it wasn't with the girl, after all, but he had enough knowledge of men to recognise that he would get nothing definite out of the man at the other end of the line. He in his turn drew a bow at a venture.

"I had an appointment with Sir Denis this after-

noon," he said mendaciously. "I must have missed him. Perhaps he meant me to come to his house. Was he in about five?"

"No, sir. He wasn't back till seven. Perhaps he forgot. He does sometimes if he's extra busy."

"I see. Well, I'll phone him in the morning. What time does he get to his laboratory?"

"About nine-thirty, sir, as a rule."

"Right. I'll get him there. Thanks very much."

"What name, sir?" But Jamieson had already rung off. He made a mental note. "Call at the flat at nine."

Then he locked and sealed the dead woman's room, examined the rest of the flat without finding anything of value, and went down to the next floor. Upon knocking, the door was opened by a worn-looking woman in the late thirties. She looked at him enquiringly as if she knew no man could call on such a household, and said nervously, "I think you've come to the wrong door."

He glanced at her left hand, saw that it wore no ring and said "Miss Herrick?"

She replied quickly, "If it's about the insurance Mrs. Summers is out and I don't understand it . . ."

He stopped her. "I've come from Scotland Yard, Miss Herrick. Perhaps I may come in for a moment. There has been a crime committed in the flat above yours during the afternoon. May I ask when you returned?"

"About six." She was trembling with apprehension.

"You heard nothing unusual in the flat above?"

"Nothing at all."

"Nor met anyone coming down the stairs from that floor as you came in?"

"No one at all."

"Is there usually much noise from that flat?"

"Oh no, not very much. Sometimes Mrs. Davenport has a friend to dinner . . ."

"You haven't seen any of them?"

"Certainly not."

"Ah!" He stroked his clean-shaved chin. "That's rather a pity. Is Mrs. Summers in?" She hesitated. "If she isn't I must wait for her to come back."

"I think, as a matter of fact, she has just returned. I will see."

She opened a door that obviously led into a kitchen and Jamieson could hear a nervous whispered colloquy. Then Mrs. Summers, a younger and far more self-possessed woman, appeared.

"Miss Herrick tells me there's been an upset on the floor above. I'm afraid I can't help you as I've only just returned. I've been dining out."

"You didn't come back at all between, say, four and seven?"

"No. Do you suspect me of burgling the flat?"

"Not at all, madam. I thought that if you had chanced to come in for a short time you might have heard movements up there."

"We should have heard them if there had been any. That's the beauty of these flats. You hear every sound. I could tell you exactly the time Mrs. Davenport has her bath every morning."

"And that is?"

"Eight o'clock. We're generally sitting down to breakfast then." But she didn't sound envious or superior.

"Thank you. I apologise for the intrusion, but you will understand how necessary it is for us to gather up every possible piece of information."

He was not disappointed at the result of his enquiry, having expected nothing more. Nor did he despair when frequent ringing at the door of the flat facing Mrs. Davenport's brought no reply, and he subsequently learned from the porter that the tenants were away, one of the children having recently recovered from chicken-pox. The flat was to be shut for about three weeks, he understood.

On his way back to the Yard he sent a cable to the Sûreté, asking for all possible details of the trial of Mrs. Courcy, and a note of all persons giving evidence or known to be her intimates; and he added, rather half-heartedly, a request for news concerning a black-bearded man.

Then he went on to Scotland Yard to report the matter to the Chief. The two discussed it minutely for some time, while Davidson examined the fragment of black hair. His opinion was what Jamieson had anticipated; it was not human hair, and it was decided that on the morrow two men should go the rounds of the London wig-makers trying to trace a small pointed beard and a black wig. It was agreed that quite probably no information would be forthcoming, since there were so many small men who might have supplied the disguise, and whose names it would be next to impossible to obtain. But the

chance was worth taking and, there being nothing else to be learned that night—a telephone message to Rossiter's house having warned them that he also was dining away from home—Jamieson left the Yard undertaking to see Brinsley before he left his flat the next morning.

CHAPTER VI

THE LONG SHADOW

1

HE didn't get Denis at his flat at nine after all, for he, having spent a sleepless night, decided he might as well try to work, and at seven o'clock rang for Mayes.

"I want breakfast at eight," he said. "You can tell Mr. Dick that if he's down after five past there won't be anything left for him. And, by the way, that fellow who 'phoned last night. Didn't he give you a name?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't you ask him?"

"Yes, sir, but he rang off."

Denis frowned. "Deuced fishy. What precisely did he say?"

"That he had an appointment with you at five o'clock yesterday."

"Did he say where?"

"I suppose he meant the laboratory, sir, because he said perhaps the mistake was his and he ought to have come here."

"He oughtn't, not here or anywhere else where I am. He's either a lunatic or a crook, probably the last. There are lots of 'em about. Unless. . ." He

frowned. "Look here, Mayes, did he tell you what he was going to do?"

"He said he was going to 'phone your laboratory this morning."

"That's all right. But suppose he comes here, keep him out at all costs. If he wants to leave a note for me, say I shan't be in till the morning and he can post it. I can deal with him if he turns up in Griffiths Square. There's a very useful stick of mine in the hall-stand. The handle's nearly as hefty as a life-preserver. Use that, if necessary. There's a law permitting men to defend their property and their house to the uttermost."

Mayes hesitated. "Do you know who he is, sir?"

"Not an earthly. But there are plenty of people going about who'd be delighted to get a glimpse at my notebook for half an hour. And you know my way of scattering memoranda about. Take pretty good care no one has a chance of collecting 'em. I've reached a crucial point, Mayes. You don't know anything about science, do you?"

"I know you do it, sir."

Denis grinned. " 'Do it' is a lovely expression, Mayes. Well, I'm working up to something that has been puzzling these bigwigs for years, quite a trifling detail, only nothing's really trifling in science. I'm not a bit surprised to hear someone's on my trail. Pull him in, Mayes, if he tries any funny business on you.

He came down to breakfast to find his brother already in the dining-room.

"Exit the best worm," he murmured. "Give me something to eat, Dick. I've got a headache."

"That comes of revelling with seasoned birds like Rossiter. How was he?"

"As friendly as ever. How did the theatre go off?"

Dick told him and propped up the *Times* against a milk-jug. Denis always took the paper with him when he departed; Dick sometimes bought the *Daily News* on the way to the office, but more often read some technical weekly. To-day he rapidly ran his eye down the *Births, Marriages and Deaths*, and Denis was surprised by a sudden exclamation that Dick bit in two just too late to avoid attention.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing much. I wonder if anybody wants to sell a decent Sealyham."

"You couldn't keep it in a flat if they did. Why not tell me the truth? I shall only have to go through the lists myself if you don't. It isn't Lucille?" For all the controlled calmness of his voice he could not disguise from Dick an awful apprehension.

"Oh Lord, no." His voice was too casual to carry much conviction. "It's only that fellow Voisey."

"Dead?"

"Lost his wife. You knew he had a wife? Oh yes. I believe they didn't hit it off or something."

"Sure it's the same one?"

"'M. Laura Margaret, wife of Gilbert Voisey, aged thirty-four.'"

Denis nodded and helped himself to marmalade. His face had taken on that impassive look that Dick

recognised. If Gilbert was free now would Lucille throw everything to the winds and marry the fellow? Denis could easily believe that Rossiter would be glad enough. Voisey was younger, in the Rossiters' set, a good dancer, a useful man at a dinner-party, making an excellent income and likely to make more. It seemed to Denis extremely probable that there would soon be little notices in the *Times* and the *Morning Post* to the effect that the marriage arranged between Sir Denis Brinsley, Bart., and Miss Lucille Tudor would not take place. The final step would rest with him; Lucille might ask for her freedom but she wouldn't take it by force. Not that it mattered. Denis wondered wretchedly whether there were any men outside plays and novels who claimed their rights in such circumstances. He knew he couldn't.

The spurious tranquillity that had been buoying him up earlier dispersed by that news, he got up and walked over to the window. It was a pelting morning; he stood an instant gloomily surveying the weather, and the procession of umbrellas, black, green, brown, reseda, rose and cherry, like an army of unsteady tortoises, large and small, old and new, grim or gay, that passed under the window. Then he plunged into a Burberry and went out. Dick, following him twenty-five minutes later, collided with a man in a dark suit and a trilby hat just outside the door.

The stranger apologised. "Sir Denis Brinsley?" he suggested.

"Odd hours these coves choose to call," reflected

Dick, adding aloud, "I'm afraid not. You want my brother."

"Is he at home?"

"You're more likely to find him at his laboratory."

"So early?"

"He's pretty busy."

"I see. That's in Griffiths Square, isn't it?"

"Yes. South Kensington. Take a bus; it goes past the door. That's nearer than the tube."

The stranger thanked him and vanished; Dick walked down to the station, bought a *Morning Star* because all the *News* had been sold, and settled himself comfortably in a double seat. The first thing he saw as he opened the paper was a huge caption

BLOOMSBURY MURDER MYSTERY

WOMAN FOUND STRANGLED

Not being, as he had once explained to Lesley, of a morbid turn of mind, he was passing that unread when his eye caught a word—a name. He looked swiftly back. Then he sat for a full minute, stiff, appalled, shocked to immobility. Recovering himself he read:—

The tenants of Pontifex Mansions, Pontifex Street, Oxford Street, were horrified to learn last night that a peculiarly brutal murder had taken place in a flat on the second floor during yesterday afternoon. Mr. Wyndham Grain, the famous artist, and Mr. Gilbert Voisey, author of *A Quiet Gentleman* and *White unto Harvest,* paying a call upon Mrs. Helen Davenport, a new-comer to the Mansions, last

night, were horrified to discover her dead body stretched on the couch in the living-room. She had been strangled and appeared to have been dead between three and four hours. The front door had been left on the latch and they were thus enabled to gain admission. Mr. Wyndham Grain was calling with a view to discussing the painting of her portrait. The police were immediately notified and it is expected that an arrest will shortly be made.

Then, in smaller type, came this information:

Mrs. Helen Davenport was formerly Mrs. Hilary Courcy, widow of Colonel Hilary Courcy, who died of poisoning in suspicious circumstances at Rocqueville in 1912. Mrs. Courcy was arrested for the murder, but acquitted.

Dick laid the paper down. It was impossible, of course, absolutely unthinkable, but reason perpetually struggled with loyalty insisting that Denis had come back late last night, that he had agreed to see Mrs. Davenport, that she had been killed precisely at the time he was due to arrive, that he had said in that odd way that he didn't expect to see her again, that he had been touchy, forgetful, *distrait*. That Mrs. Davenport had had some hold over him, dating back probably a great many years, Dick was sure. Denis' haggard expression of the past few weeks was proof of that. Suppose he had gone to the flat, lost his head . . . Dick had once or twice seen Denis when his temper was out of control. He could perfectly believe that at such moments he would be capable of murder. He recalled an occasion when, as a boy, he had been teasing one of Denis' dogs in all good nature and had accidentally hurt the beast that had gone whining to its master.

Denis, seeing nothing but wanton cruelty in a moment's thoughtlessness, had caught up a riding-switch that lay close at hand and claimed payment a thousandfold. Dick smiled wryly at that memory even now. Then he remembered the paper before him and all thought of smiling vanished. One thing puzzled him. Surely if Denis had known anything about it he'd have gone to the police. It was abominable, of course, even to suppose for an instant that he was implicated; but to Dick's mind the secrecy was worse than the crime. Yet back doors and skulking on sideroads weren't Denis' way at all. But what if he had arrived there and found her murdered and realised how black things would look against him and so slipped away without a word, leaving the door unlatched in his hurry? Looked at from whatever angle you chose the position for him was pretty hellish. As Dick got out of his train he wondered what Lucille would say. An evil providence had laid the track very nicely for her. Just when she had excellent reason for wanting to get free a road was opened to her.

2

Denis' secretary, Miss Margetson, didn't come in till about twenty past nine. She experienced no surprise at seeing her employer there; his working hours were erratic; sometimes he stayed at the laboratory till ten or eleven at night. She herself was ostensibly on duty from nine-thirty till five-thirty, but she seldom bothered about hours. She found the work fascinating and cherished an inward romance

concerning Denis. She liked the lean aquiline type; she liked his eagerness, his concentration, his pleasant manner, his consideration for her whenever he could switch his thoughts off his work. She said as she came in, a pleasant-looking girl of seven-and-twenty with short reddish hair, glasses and a memory that would have won her twice her salary in a City office, "I hope you haven't been wanting me, Sir Denis."

Denis, who had spent his time since his arrival sitting at his desk with his head in his hands, because he really had got a shocking headache, looked up. "Oh good morning, Miss Margetson. No, I haven't really started work. Help me to open these letters, will you? There seems to be an unholy lot of people anxious for my autograph to-day." For twenty minutes they slit envelopes and Miss Margetson made pencil hieroglyphics on the tops of the letters. Denis scarcely ever dictated; he had too many other more important things to do.

They had just put by the last letter when someone knocked on the outer door. Miss Margetson vanished to see who it was, and when she had gone Denis saw that she had left a tiny bottle of aspirin tablets on his table, a small attention that moved him, because he usually had to do things for other people and wasn't at all accustomed to other people doing them for him. Miss Margetson came back with a card that he took.

"Inspector Jamieson, Scotland Yard," he said. "What the deuce . . .?"

"I shan't detain you many minutes, Sir Denis,"

said a voice and he looked up to see the tall soldierly figure on the threshold. He nodded to his secretary who disappeared into the outer office.

"Take a pew," he murmured hospitably. "Smoke?" He offered a cigarette-case. Jamieson helped himself and felt for a mythical match-box.

"Here you are," suggested the other, and snapped open a pipe-lighter that, unlike most of its kind, was immediately effective. "And now what can I do for you?" He hoped it was something simple because he felt sick and wretched and had a lot of work to do.

"I want a little information."

"Certainly, so long as it isn't about science."

"Scotland Yard isn't especially concerned with science at the moment," retorted Jamieson smoothly.

"Quite as it should be. Well, what is it? And I'm curious to know why you're on my track. Was it you who telephoned last night?"

"It was."

"Well, why? I haven't committed murder."

The inspector raised mental eyebrows. Then he said, "No, Sir Denis, but someone has."

For the second time that morning his companion's thoughts flew to Lucille. It was one of those grey hopeless days when all nature seems in mourning for lost happiness; Brinsley felt he could believe the starkest tragedy on such a day as this.

He asked through dry lips, "Who's that?"

"A lady known as Mrs. Helen Davenport. She was found strangled in her flat in Pontifex Mansions last night."

He was watching his man narrowly. Denis gave no sign. There was a long silence; Jamieson was very

wary; he glanced at the drawers of the knee-hole desk. They were all shut. He had known men taken unawares like this whip out a revolver and finish themselves off before a statement could be taken. Denis, however, kept his hands on the table. He was stiff as marble, and his face was that curious ashen hue again. At last he spoke.

"And you come to me?"

"We have reason to believe you knew the lady."

"Are you visiting everyone whose name appears in her address book?"

"Not yet. Doubtless, if it proves necessary, we shall do that later. (No need to tell this fellow that they couldn't find any sign of a visiting list.) But I found a note on her telephone block giving your laboratory telephone number. I thought that possibly you could give us some information."

He asked heavily, "Who found her?"

"Two gentlemen who were going to call on her."

"Why not ask them to help you?"

"I have asked them. They have told me what they know. Now I ask you. When was the last time you saw her?"

Denis hesitated a moment. His thoughts were turning crazily like a demented mouse in a pail of icy water, swimming round and round in choking despair. Now everything was coming out; it was inevitable. He saw the wave of public opinion sweeping Lucille out of his sight for evermore.

"About a fortnight ago," he stammered, unable to think coherently.

"You're sure it wasn't later than that."

"Reasonably sure."

"Is there anything that would especially mark the day for you?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid. But you'll find a fortnight as near as makes no difference."

"You have had telephonic conversation with her?"

"No."

"Neither here nor at your flat?"

"Neither."

"Then why," demanded Jamieson sharply, "should the number of your laboratory be written on her telephone pad?"

"She telephoned me here yesterday," he returned dizzily.

"You said you had no telephonic conversation with her at all. Did you or did you not? Well, Sir Denis?" The voice had lost its slow timbre; now it was commanding and accusing. The man bent forward and fixed piercing eyes on his victim. Denis put his hands over his eyes again.

"Is this what they call the Third Degree? I've got an outrageously bad headache this morning. It's no use trying to browbeat me into giving you clues. I haven't any. I think I'm right in saying that she never telephoned here before. But my secretary could tell you."

He pressed a button and Miss Margetson came in. The trouble in Denis' face communicated itself to her.

"Yes, Sir Denis?"

He said flatly, "Mrs. Davenport has been murdered. But perhaps you saw that in this morning's papers. The inspector wants to know what time she

telephoned last night and if she's ever done it before."

"She telephoned last night at about half-past five."

"You're sure of the time?"

"Yes, because she said it was the half-hour and if you were very quick you could get there before six."

The detective took up the questionnaire. "She has telephoned to Sir Denis before?"

"Never while I was here."

"But there are times when Sir Denis is here alone?"

"It's his laboratory," she pointed out in cold tones.

He took no notice of that. "And when she telephoned yesterday what happened?"

"I put the call through to this room, and then I went down to the basement for a minute or two. When I came back Sir Denis was just hanging up the receiver, and he told me he'd finished work for to-day. He said he wanted to think things out and he liked walking through the streets."

"He gave you no reason?"

"He said Mr. Graham had telephoned and he didn't feel he could face him."

"You didn't take that call?"

"I was downstairs."

"For how long?"

"About five minutes."

"And Sir Denis went out immediately?"

"About ten minutes later. I stayed till six, then I locked up and went home."

"What exactly did Mrs. Davenport say?"

"Just that she wanted to speak to Sir Denis at once, that she had had some difficulty in getting through, that it was very urgent, and she had tried his house and been told he was here. Then I put the call through to this room and went downstairs."

"And Sir Denis left at about twenty minutes to six?"

"I suppose so. I didn't actually look at the clock."

"I see. Thank you. That's what I wanted to know."

The girl glanced at Denis and in response to his nod went away again, fuming with excitement and rage. Jamieson waited till the door was shut and then asked, "Now, when you left the laboratory, you went to see Mrs. Davenport?"

"No. I had already told her over the telephone I couldn't get away."

"But immediately afterwards you left the laboratory."

"I had meant to stay and work, but I couldn't stomach the notion of Graham here. He's a maddening fellow—and I was in the thick of my work. He'd have driven me crazy."

"So you went out. Anywhere in particular?"

"I always find walking quickens the intelligence. I walked for about an hour and then took the tube back to my house."

"You didn't meet anyone you knew?"

Denis eyed him steadily. "Is all this cross-examination according to routine?"

"We have to make our statements as complete as

possible. If you could mention the name of someone you met, or some place you went into where you would be remembered, that would close that side of the evidence. I'm afraid this telephone call is bound to be brought into the case."

"I regret that I can't do anything of the kind," returned Denis slowly. "I met no one, and as I simply walked through the quieter streets of the Temple and came down at length by the river I'm not likely to have been seen by any acquaintances. And I didn't go into a tea-shop or a drinking-den. So that bit of the evidence must remain for ever incomplete."

"There's another point. You had some particular reason for wishing to avoid Mrs. Davenport?"

"Say rather, I had no particular reason for wishing to see her. I had nothing to say . . ."

"You had known her long?"

"I met her at Mr. Rossiter's house—Julian Rossiter of 119 Hyde Park Corner, about six weeks ago —no, a little more, I think say, two months. He could tell you the exact date, I daresay, as he had a dinner-party on that night. He met her abroad last year, I believe."

"But you knew her well?"

Denis shrugged his shoulders. "She was an acquaintance."

Jamieson was far from satisfied, but at that stage he realised that he had no right to go more minutely into details; he had run his man to earth and had been told that he had not been near the flat for a fortnight; and until he could in some way disprove that he must mark time.

"There's only one more thing, I want, and that's the address of this man, Graham."

"He lives in York; when he's in London he usually stays at the Adelphi. He didn't actually mention his address last night. I daresay I didn't give him much opportunity."

"But he's in London?"

Denis laughed shortly. "Presumably. I'm not suggesting that he'd make a special journey from York at that hour just to see me."

"And his home address, in case he has already returned?"

"48 Priorsgate."

"Thank you. That's all, I think. I should warn you that you may very possibly be called upon to attend the inquest."

On his way out he stopped to put a final question to the sandy-haired secretary. "About this lady," he began.

She faced him scornfully. "You're not trying to connect Sir Denis with her death?" she exclaimed. "You don't imagine . . ."

"It is not my business to imagine anything. After Sir Denis had gone, did she telephone again?"

"No."

"Not to beg him to reconsider his decision not to come to her?"

"Oh, was that what she wanted? I didn't know. I wasn't there, of course, when they were talking. No, she didn't ring up again."

"Thank you." He went out into the street. Miss Margetson had told him that Mrs. Davenport tele-

phoned Brinsley's house; he must get back there at once and find out what she had actually said.

Mayes opened the door. Without preamble Jamieson produced his card and said, "I want a minute's conversation with you. Is there anywhere private?"

"There's no one in the flat but myself," said Mayes coldly. That being precisely what Jamieson wanted to know, for eavesdropping was no part of his plan in this case, he went on smoothly, "Then that's all right. I daresay you've seen in the papers the death of Mrs. Helen Davenport."

Mayes shook his head stolidly. "No, sir, I don't see the papers till the evening."

"You know the name?"

"I've heard it, sir."

"Yes. She was a friend of Sir Denis."

"Sir Denis naturally wouldn't mention her to me."

"Oh quite. I hear she telephoned this house an hour or two before her death. Was Sir Denis in?"

"Sir Denis didn't return till seven o'clock last night, sir."

"How did you know she was killed last night?"

"Killed, sir?" Mayes' imperturbability seemed a thought shaken.

"Yes. She's been murdered. If you hadn't seen the paper how did you know?"

But he had met his match in the Brinsleys' butler. "Because if it had been the night before it would have been in last night's paper. I read it from cover to cover, and there was no mention of the lady."

"I see. Did you take the call in Sir Denis' absence?"

"No, sir. I daresay Mr. Richard Brinsley took it."

"Do you remember it?"

"There was a telephone call."

"Do you recall the time?"

"I couldn't be certain, sir. About five, I think."

"A little later than that surely," suggested the detective.

"Very little later, sir. I recollect because at half-past five I went into the library where the telephone is, and Mr. Richard had gone into the dining-room and was reading. He liked the lights in the dining-room better. And he never moved after that."

"Why should you be sure you went into the study at half-past five?"

"I always draw down the blinds at half-past five, sir, this time of the year. I'm very punctual about such things."

"Well, he must just have left the library."

"Possibly, sir. Now I come to think of it there were two calls quite close to one another. Perhaps the lady's was the second."

"Mr. Brinsley took them both?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Sometime I must get in touch with him. What time is he home?"

"Generally about six, sir. Last night he was early; he'd been working very late for a long time and I suppose last night he wanted a rest."

"If I telephone about half-past six shall I be likely to get him?"

"I will tell him, sir."

"Thanks. Will you? Half-past six." That, he reflected, would prevent the fool tearing to the tele-

phone the instant the front door was shut and warning the fellow, if any warning should be necessary.

"By the way," he had moved towards the door but he turned his head over his shoulder with the words, "could you identify the lady, if necessary?"

"I never saw her, sir. She never came here."

"Of course not. A bachelor establishment, isn't it? Thank you. I suppose if I called at six-thirty Mr. Brinsley would really be in? Is his office a long way off?"

"At the Lucan Engineering Works, sir. A matter of half an hour."

"Tell him to expect me, then. Thank you for your information." He wondered, with a sudden grin, whether anyone ever had the nerve to tip Mayes. Nothing under a five-pound note would seem adequate.

3

When Jamieson had gone Mayes stood for a short time quite motionless in the hall, as if he expected the man to come creeping back like a spy. Mayes had the normal distrust of his type of the police, backed up by personal experience. The mention of Mrs. Davenport's name had distressed him more than the astute Jamieson had realised; he, like Dick, knew well enough the authorship of those maddeningly regular letters that menaced Denis. The visit of a detective within a few hours of her death seemed to him sinister, and he realised with a shock that the man who had put such casual questions to him anent the hour of his employer's return would leave no stone unturned to discover whatever

it was that the past held concerning the relation of these two. He had just gone slowly back to the kitchen, convinced that Jamieson really had taken himself off when the bell rang again. When he opened the door it was to find Lucille Tudor on the threshold, a grey moleskin coat gathered round her long and lovely throat, a tiny dark hat pulled over those brooding and mysterious eyes.

"Good morning, Mayes. I suppose Sir Denis isn't in?"

"Good morning, miss. I'm afraid not." Her secret alluring beauty made no impression on him any more than it did on Dick who thought her rather like a cul-de-sac, perpetually drawing a fellow up short just when he expected a bend in the road to reveal undreamed-of beauties. It didn't seem to Mayes that this engagement was doing the master any good at all. What he liked himself was a matey sort of woman who wouldn't blush at the idea of eating onions and who didn't want a man at her knees. He didn't believe in demeaning oneself to a female. Sir Denis, he reflected, had been on his knees so long that he'd got cramp, and pretty wretched he looked over the whole affair. Mayes had never heard of the saint who wouldn't even look on the face of his mother lest he be tempted to unchastity, but he would have thought him a wise philosopher. There never was any good coming out of women . . . All that passed rapidly through Mayes' mind as Lucille waited on the step.

"In his laboratory?"

"Yes, miss." Couldn't the hussy even leave him alone there? Apparently the hussy could. "I can't

disturb him there. He hates it when he's busy. I've brought back a book from Mr. Rossiter. I think Sir Denis has put the second volume out for me to take back."

"He didn't say nothing to me, miss. He seemed in a bit of a hurry this morning."

"Well, will you just see if he left it in his library? No, I'll stay here. I've got the car at the door."

She waited till Mayes came back with the information that there was no sign of the book anywhere. She frowned. "I'll come and look myself. It's bound to be in one of the shelves." She found it in a minute or two and then turned towards the table, saying, "I will leave a note to tell him I have it."

Mayes went discreetly into the hall and waited. Nearly ten minutes later she came out, looking very pale, saying, "I've left the note on his table." He thought it must be a pretty long one and hoped it didn't mean further trouble. When he went into the room he found the fragments of several torn sheets in the basket. Automatically he took them away; the Brinsleys were easy people to serve, but there were two things that irritated Denis, and one was to find papers in his basket and the other to come into a room and see the calendar standing at yesterday's date.

4

Jamieson, meanwhile, went straight to the Lucan Works where he asked for Dick. He had scarcely seated himself before that young man appeared, looking pale and a little set about the mouth and chin as if he suspected a trap to betray his brother.

Jamieson came to the point with equal precision. "There are one or two questions I want to put to you with regard to the murder of Mrs. Davenport. Are we likely to be disturbed here?"

"This is the waiting-room. I daresay we shan't. I'm afraid there's nowhere else but the manager's room and he wouldn't appreciate the interruption."

"I understand from your butler, Mr. Brinsley, that Mrs. Davenport telephoned your house last night."

"Yes. She wanted to speak to my brother."

"Who was out?"

"Yes."

"You told her where she could find him?"

"I gave her the telephone number of his laboratory."

"And she rang him up there?"

"Yes. She got through to me again five minutes later to say she had spoken to him."

"And that he was going to see her at once?" He put the question nonchalantly. Dick, however, had been dreaming of just such an interview all the morning and he replied non-committally, "She said it was all right."

"She telephoned a second time merely to tell you it was all right?" Jamieson seemed sceptical. Dick, however, was as helpful as a block of stone.

"I think she wanted to thank me for putting her in touch."

"She said nothing else? It is most important that we should find out how she proposed to spend the evening. She said nothing that would show you why

she should wish to speak to your brother so urgently?"

"She would hardly say it to me. I'm sorry." He was very polite but quite definite. "I really didn't know her at all."

"I see. It's unfortunate you cannot help me more. I had hoped she might give you some hint."

Since it was obvious that he would get nothing more out of the young man, Jamieson left the Lucan Works and turned toward Hyde Park Corner. Here he found Rossiter in and expecting him.

"I guessed Grain would mention me in connection with this appalling case," he said.

"Yes. I understand the lady was a friend of yours."

"Rather a friend of my wife's. We came across her last spring in a second-rate little hotel in Normandy. The train broke down unexpectedly, and all the decent hotels were full up, so we had no choice. Mrs. Davenport was the only other Englishwoman in the place, and she and my wife got into conversation in the *foyer* the first evening. There was some difficulty about baths, and Mrs. Rossiter could not make herself understood. The girl there was incredibly dense; fortunately, Mrs. Davenport knew the lie of the land and she straightened matters out. After that we couldn't do less than ask her to dine at our table; she seemed lonely and was obviously accustomed in the first place to a more *convenable* style of living. I gathered that she had had reverses and had been living very quietly for some years. She told us that she was considering returning to Eng-

land where she was going to try for journalistic work. She had at one time written fashion articles for an English paper. That was when she was living with her husband in Paris."

"She was a widow when you met her?"

"Oh yes. She had been a widow for many years. Of course, at that time we knew nothing of her story . . ."

"And you discovered it . . . ?"

"She told us most candidly what had happened. That was later. At the time I merely threw out a vague hint about hoping to be of service to her when she came over, and my wife gave her our address. I must confess I had forgotten all about her, even her name—one meets so many people and drops so many casual hints like that in travelling about—and it was quite a surprise when I got a letter from her saying that she was in London in a small flat in Bloomsbury, and reminding me of my half-promise. She hadn't realised, I think, how tremendously difficult it is to get that sort of work nowadays; the women begin as young as the men, and they have to start in the provinces. Competition's cut-throat all along the line. I happen to know an editor or two and I sent her their names and a line of introduction, and I rang one of 'em up and said I'd be glad if he'd give her a show just to see what she could do. Half these women, especially the ones who aren't young and bred to the job, can do nothing worth the paper it's typed on. The second one said bluntly he couldn't do a thing, but I believe she did get something out of the other. His name's Meakin; he runs a paper called Woman in the World or some-

thing like that. Pays good dividends. It's one of Rowbottom's press."

"You didn't know Mrs. Davenport's past history then?"

"Not then. But as soon as she'd secured her job she wrote to us, and then came to call on my wife, and explained the position most frankly. Her husband sounds a bad egg, but I suppose the police are like umpires—strictly neutral. Anyway, it wasn't our job and it had happened in another country fourteen years ago and if we'd dropped her then it would have been damned awkward, and she had been acquitted, so of course we said the only thing possible. We agreed that if questions were asked we would say the late Davenport was a clergyman who had died abroad."

Jamieson nodded; he readily understood Rossiter's attitude; it wasn't surprising in an age whose chief virtue was its tolerance, and that wasn't aware that this rested largely on laziness that hates to be troubled by abstruse problems or inconvenienced by awkward situations, and that provided a useful back door in case the generation itself wanted a way out at any time.

"Were they what you would call intimate—Mrs. Rossiter and the deceased?" he questioned.

"I should hardly say that. She dined here two or three times; in fact it was here that Voisey and Grain met her, I believe."

"Did she amplify her story at all, tell you where the trial took place, or how long ago?"

"Fourteen years, and in France. I can't tell you anything more definite than that."

"Did she live alone at her flat?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you. I never actually saw it."

"Had she been here shortly before her death?"

"She came to tea one afternoon last week, I believe. My wife might remember the day." He rang a bell and when the maid came in asked, "Is your mistress in?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! Well, Agnes, do you remember which day it was Mrs. Davenport came to tea?"

"Last Tuesday, sir."

"Last Tuesday. All right, Agnes. Is there anything else I can do to help you?" he added as the maid shut the door.

"You can tell me the name of the hotel where you met her."

"The Hotel Van Dyck, Rue Aigle d'Or, Moineux, Normandy."

"Thank you. Did she ever mention relations?"

"She never spoke of her past life at all, except that once. I don't know—I suppose she has relations of a sort—most people have—but whether they'll be anxious to come forward in the circumstances . . . Davenport isn't an altogether uncommon name."

"No. Well, I think that's all you can tell me. In the absence of relations it may be necessary for you to be present to identify the body at the inquest."

"When will that be?"

"I can't say definitely. It'll be delayed a day or two in the hopes of definite suspicion attaching to someone. That saves so much time."

"Isn't there a porter at the flats who could help you?"

"Unfortunately he was ill. But you'll get the official notification. In a case like this it'll be a complicated affair, and there will be a good many witnesses."

His next step was to discover whether Denis Brinsley was speaking the truth when he declared that he had left his laboratory with such unbecoming speed the previous evening because of the man called Graham. It seemed to Jamieson such a weak excuse that it might easily be true. He hailed a passing taxi and was driven to the Adelphi Hotel. Since there was at present no case against the scientist he determined not to let the management know he was a C.I.D. man unless it should prove absolutely necessary. He accosted the dapper young clerk.

"You have a Mr. Graham staying here, I think?"

The youth turned up the books, then shook his head. "No, sir. Not here."

"Mr. Graham of York," persisted Jamieson.

The young man's face brightened. "Oh, I know whom you mean. No, he isn't here now."

Jamieson frowned in assumed perplexity. "Then —but I don't understand. He told me to meet him here. Has he just been staying at your hotel?"

"No, sir. He hasn't been down for nearly three months."

"Perhaps I have made a mistake; possibly he is staying at his club."

"He always does stay here, sir, when he's in town. He's coming down next week. Perhaps you've mistaken the date."

"Next week? Is that so?" Jamieson sounded enormously relieved. "Then I haven't missed him after all. It is so difficult for me to get to York, and it's most important I should see him. Will you tell me what day?"

"Next Monday, for a few days, he says."

"Then the error must be mine. I thought he said I was to meet him here to-day; of course, he must have meant next Tuesday."

Leaving the hotel he turned into an adjacent post office. Here he asked for a provincial telephone directory, and looked up Graham's telephonic address at York. He had to wait some time before the trunk call came through, and then he was answered by a man who was presumably the butler.

"Is Mr. Graham there?"

"Who is that?"

"Sir Denis Brinsley speaking."

That seemed to be a magic word, for the butler's tone changed instantly.

"Mr. Graham is not at home, sir; he would be very sorry, I know, to miss you. But he is out and unfortunately will not be home until four o'clock."

"He isn't proposing to come to London shortly, is he?"

"Next week."

"Oh? Will he be staying at the Adelphi as usual?"

"Yes, sir. I know he is hoping to see you."

"I had an idea that he was coming down *this* week."

"Oh no, sir. There was never any suggestion of that. Next Monday. Can I give him any message, sir?"

"No, thanks, I think not. If he's coming down next week I can see him then."

As he hung up the receiver and came out of the box Jamieson's eyes hardened. It was curiously stupid of Brinsley to have furnished an alibi that could be so easily broken, but probably any other that he might have figured out would have been as simply unveiled. Unless he had taken his brother into his confidence he had to trust to chance, and chance was a flimsy thread on which to hang over an abyss, as Jamieson knew. The more he considered the matter the more certain did he feel that when Brinsley left his laboratory on Monday night he had gone straight to Pontifex Mansions. He thought that the average coroner's jury would think the same.

CHAPTER VII

THE HEART OF THE MAZE

JAMIESON decided that his best plan would be to go on to the Yard to learn whether there was yet any reply to his cable of the previous day. If, as seemed probable, the case was easily traced, an answer could be sent by the air mail and should by this time be awaiting him at Headquarters. On his arrival he found not only a package bearing a French stamp but also the doctor's report on the body of the dead woman. This, being very short, he read first. It threw no new light on the position, merely stating that the deceased was a woman aged forty-two or forty-three, height five foot seven, weight about ten stone five, with no distinguishing physical characteristics and with no birth marks. Death was due to strangulation. There was no sign of any affection of the heart, and no trace of poison in the body. Death had occurred between five and six the previous night.

That having led him no further, it was with a good deal of suppressed eagerness that he turned to the other envelope. Inside this was a note summarising the case, a second note referring to Mlle. Lecoq, a letter covering all the enclosures, and the full text of the trial in 1912. All these documents were written in French, but that presented no dif-

ficulty to the detective who had been on various occasions to the Continent on the track of international thieves. This chanced to be his first murder case and he was anxious that it should be flawlessly handled.

The first paper—the summary of the case—was very brief.

> COURCY, Mrs Helen Patricia, aged 29, Englishwoman domiciled in France, arraigned for murder of her husband, Colonel Hilary James Courcy, aged 51, by administration of arsenic. Case tried April 1912; lasted five days; jury after all-night absence disagreed; second trial held same year; jury absent eleven hours; returned verdict of Death by arsenical poisoning with insufficient evidence to show by whom administered. Mrs. Courcy acquitted.

The second paper referred to Mlle. Lecoq concerning whom information was vague. She had given evidence, certainly, as to the relations of the pair; but nothing of importance had transpired. After the trial she had left Rocqueville and nothing more was known of her. Enquiries, however, were being set on foot and any news should be forwarded at once. Her position in the Courcy household had been that of lady's-maid to Mrs. Courcy during that summer, her own maid having left unexpectedly to be married. There her history ended. After the trial she had vanished and no one knew where. All Jamieson could do was either wait or prosecute enquiries from his side.

As for the black-bearded man no one had heard of him; there were, doubtless, various bearded men among the lady's earlier acquaintance but none who

had been especially connected with her during that year. Jamieson smiled drily; it would have been more disconcerting to have learned that there ever had been a black-bearded lover, in view of Davidson's report.

The third paper was very long and minutely detailed. Condensed it stated that the trial of Mrs. Courcy had aroused widespread interest, so much so that large crowds had been unable to gain admittance to the court. The couple had taken a villa just outside Rocqueville for the summer; it was understood that they had been married six or seven years in all, and had spent the last three years travelling on the Continent. The disparity in age might account for the terms on which they lived, which were none too well spoken of. The Colonel was known to be fond of his glass, though he was seldom seen actually in liquor (that, Helen Courcy used to reflect bitterly, he kept for his wife); he appeared popular among his countrymen of whom there was a small colony in the neighbourhood. The only child of the marriage had died in infancy, which seemed to be a great grief to the father. A maid had given evidence that he taunted his wife with being too selfish to bear his children, to which she had replied that a man like himself had no right to perpetuate a bad strain. Quarrels between the two had been constant; in reply to a suggestion that affairs had more than once come to blows the maid asseverated that she knew nothing of the matter, and this was corroborated by the rest of the staff. The general feeling, however, was that the Colonel was being shielded by his employees. He had the reputation of

being a good master and he paid high wages. He was known to be addicted to the company of young and handsome ladies, and his wife no doubt had taken exception to this. In view of their relations, however, which were merely formal, the pair occupying separate apartments at the villa, this was regarded as unreasonable on her side. She was invariably escorted to all the dinners and dances that mattered, occasionally by her husband but more usually by a male friend. A few days before the Colonel's death there had been a quarrel of more than normal dimensions. The lady had said something bitter about wishing him dead so that she might find happiness elsewhere, to which he had retorted coarsely that she surely would not think it necessary to wait for his death, and had proceeded then to definite accusations saying that she had a lover or lovers. No names were mentioned, according to the evidence, and the strictest cross-examination failed to elicit any. Three days later the Colonel had been taken ill after a dinner-party and had died the following day in great pain. Large quantities of arsenic had been found in the body, and subsequent search revealed a quantity of arsenic hidden in a cupboard in Mrs. Courcy's room. The case for the prosecution seemed strong until the chemist's evidence was called. The only chemist who had sold arsenic during the previous seven weeks had done so on a day when Mrs. Courcy showed herself to have been several miles distant. Evidence was given to show that she had not slept away from home for one night during that time, and every chemist's shop within the radius of a day's journey was visited, with

the above result. An acquaintance, by no means prejudiced in the lady's favour, declared that at the time of the registration of the sale she had recognised Mrs. Courcy in the cheap seats of a music-hall in the opposite direction. Eyebrows lifted at the mention of the cheap seats, but fortunately the point was not pressed. Instead it was suggested that she had an accomplice who had procured the arsenic. All enquiry in that direction, however, proved unavailing, though Jamieson privately felt that had he been on the spot he might have unearthed some interesting facts. The presence of the arsenic in the lady's room had seemed a strong point against her until it was revealed that on the day before the Colonel's death a former maid of Mrs. Courcy had paid a visit to the house during the lady's absence and had, on the pretext of waiting for a character, been seen coming down the stairs from the direction of Mrs. Courcy's room. The woman's disappearance and malice aforethought were explained by the fact of her having been dismissed some months previously for drunkenness. Mrs. Courcy declared that no jewellery was missing, and though the prosecution was at liberty to doubt that statement—for why else, they argued, should the maid have disappeared; it would have been far simpler for her to remain till Madame's return?—they could not overrule the jury's decision. It was also shown that, owing to some small domestic upset, she had been put into the Colonel's study to wait, and that here he kept the bottle to which he helped himself every night before going to bed. There was no secret about that; every servant could have pointed out that bottle on the

instant. The suggestion was that, since the Colonel had been mainly instrumental in refusing her references that would find her satisfactory employment elsewhere, she resolved to kill two birds with one stone, and murder the Colonel and get his wife either executed or imprisoned for his murder. And after a great deal of legislation and pleading and press correspondence the jury came to the same conclusion. It was no easier to show that the maid had purchased the arsenic, but the doubt was sufficiently strong at all events to release the wife. No definite evidence as to Helen's relations with any of her attendant males was forthcoming; innuendoes, such as pursue any pretty woman, petty spite, vague and unsatisfactory rumours were heard; a name or two was mentioned, but such gossip died down feebly. There was nothing strong enough to allow the prosecution to take up the Colonel's case and level a definite accusation. On the day of the administration of the arsenic there had been a dinner party at the Courcy villa, and a list of guests was furnished, this having been obtained from the butler at the time of the trial. Jamieson ran his eye through it. There were several English and French couples, an occasional bachelor girl, one or two daughters and mammas, a sprinkling of young men of all nationalities at the moment in Madame's suite. Names were given. Fenton, O'Malley, Pringle, Atkinson, Braily, Brinsley. . . .

Jamieson put the papers carefully aside and lighted a pipe. Sir Denis Brinsley! And this afternoon he had distinctly said that he met Mrs. Davenport at Rossiter's house two months ago! Jamieson

considered the position. If Brinsley had so strenuously denied his former knowledge of the dead woman, that pointed to one inevitable conclusion—because there was something connected with that period that he particularly wished to conceal. The reason for that urgent telephone call seemed clearer in the light of this new knowledge, as did also Brinsley's immediate refusal.

Jamieson continued the report. It appeared that the Colonel might have had something to complain of. Mrs. Courcy was said to be highly extravagant; a maid said that she had jewels that the Colonel had never paid for. Whether that was true or not no one seemed certain, but a doubt existed. But what if Sir Denis Brinsley knew a good deal more about that time than he chose to admit? The prosecution had failed because it had been assumed, largely owing to lack of evidence, that the murder was the work of one hand; but what if she had had an accomplice and that accomplice the man now engaged to Lucille Tudor? All pure conjecture, of course, but conjecture leading towards a motive for murder. The fellow might well be at pains to hide that earlier record, had, in fact, done his best to do so. He would hardly expect all this ancient history to be resuscitated.

He decided to tackle the man himself; getting him off his guard he might learn a good deal. When he came to the laboratory, however, his way was barred by a firm Miss Margetson who said, "Sir Denis is busy; he can't be disturbed." She seemed to have no reverence for authority; she explained to the detective that he was engaged in some experi-

ment that had been under way for a long time and was now entering on its final stage. No, she really couldn't let Mr. Jamieson in. But presently, upset by his insistence and by a dreadful lurking fear that somehow the man whose smile could lift her into the seventh heaven and whose impatience cast her into the deeps of despair might really be in some vile incredible way connected with this murder, she slipped noiselessly into the laboratory. The door here did not fasten very satisfactorily, and Jamieson could hear every word.

"Sir Denis—I'm terribly sorry—but this man from Scotland Yard has come again, and he says . . ."

"Tell him to go to hell," returned an absorbed voice.

"I have," explained Miss Margetson desperately.

There was a long pause during which Brinsley clearly forgot his visitor's existence. Then he spoke again. "Or I'll send him there myself."

The door closed softly and Miss Margetson came back. "Sir Denis is very sorry but he's extremely occupied. Could you leave a message?"

"I could not."

"Nor a note?"

"I must see Sir Denis. But please don't trouble him any more at the moment. I'll call on him to-night at his flat. Do you know if he is likely to be in?"

Miss Margetson looked at a diary and said "There's nothing down for to-night, but of course he may be going out. I'll tell him, though. What time?"

"What time is he likely to be free?"

She hesitated. "Six o'clock?"

"Very well. You'll let him know?"

"Certainly. You have his address?"

"Yes."

Jamieson felt inwardly delighted that Brinsley had refused to see him, since it gave him the opportunity of putting his theories into practice. He had no intention of waiting until six to call at Notting Hill Gate. To a secretly outraged Mayes he said calmly, "Sir Denis is expecting me."

"Sir Denis isn't in, sir."

"No? Not in? But I went to his laboratory where he was very busy, but his secretary said that if I called later at his house . . . You're sure he isn't in?"

"Quite sure." Mayes' tone was dry with displeasure.

"His coat's hanging up here," the detective ventured to point out. "At least—if it is his coat. I'd forgotten he has a brother."

Mayes glanced at the blue coat on the pegs, acknowledged coldly that it was Denis' property, and added, "He wears a mackintosh on mornings like this," as though he thought the visitor's education sartorially had been neglected.

"Of course. But he wore it yesterday, didn't he? I caught sight of him in the street. . . ."

"Yes, he wore it yesterday. But I assure you he is not in." Then the telephone rang and Mayes had to go and answer it. Jamieson stepped instantly up to the coat, and examined it with the rapidity of the expert. Something small and green on the left sleeve

caught his eye. He took it up, looked at it for a moment with vivid interest and slipped it into his pocket as Mayes came back.

"Will you wait, sir?"

"I think not, unless you think Sir Denis is likely to be in almost at once. It's about half-past five, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. I don't expect he'll be back till half-past six. He isn't as a rule."

"And he may be even later?"

"Not to-night, sir. He's dining out."

"Then I'll come back at about half-past six. Will you tell him? Thank you."

Outside he caught a crawling taxi and was driven to the head offices of the Metropolitan Omnibus Company, where he asked for the manager.

"The manager's engaged, sir," he was told.

"Will you take him my card and say it's very urgent?" He suspected that the manager was really on the point of leaving, as it was now a quarter to six. The clerk reluctantly took the card and read it carelessly; and immediately his whole bearing changed.

"Will you take a seat a moment, sir, and I'll let him know?" Two minutes later Jamieson went into the manager's room. Briscoe, the manager, was wearing an overcoat and clearly had only just been delayed in time.

"I came to show you this," said the detective, producing the green omnibus ticket he had taken out of the cuff of Brinsley's coat, "I believe you have a way of checking the bundles of tickets issued to various buses. You will see this comes from a 201A bus, and

was clipped between Griffiths Square and Oxford Circus. What I want to establish is the approximate time that the bus on which this ticket was issued arrived at the Circus."

"I must get hold of the inspector's sheets," Briscoe told him. "It's possible that I can't let you know before to-morrow. Wait here, will you?"

Twenty minutes later he came back triumphantly with a small middle-aged man in tow. "This is Mr. Walters, one of our inspectors, who, as luck would have it, actually checked that ticket last night. We don't as a rule have inspectors on the more crowded buses at that time. He says that the omnibus should have reached Oxford Circus at six o'clock."

"And did it?"

He looked at Walters who said promptly, "I couldn't say; it was up to time when I left it at Knightsbridge; but you can't always tell the traffic at the Corner."

"H'm. But it wouldn't reach the Circus earlier than six?"

"No, not earlier."

"You could see the driver of the omnibus to-morrow, if you liked," put in Briscoe.

"The conductor would be more to the point. He's equally likely to remember the time the bus arrived, and it's just on the cards, though I admit it's improbable that he would remember the man who took this ticket. I suppose you can't help me?" He turned to the desolate-looking Walters, who shook a gloomy head.

"Not me," he replied in depressed tones. "No, sir, I wouldn't like to say that. That's asking too

much, that is. I wouldn't even know 'im again most like. These 201 buses are mostly pretty full at that time, and I wouldn't even remember if 'e was inside or out."

"If I showed you some photographs would you be likely to recognise any of the passengers?"

Again that dubious headshake. "No, sir. These gents all looks alike, 'at and coat and evening paper. I wouldn't know t'other from which, and I wouldn't like to be the one to get a innercent man into trouble."

"Quite right." Jamieson turned back to Briscoe. "Where could I see the conductor?"

"He comes off duty at eight. I could give you his address." He rang a bell and said to the clerk who answered it, "Get me Smithson's home address, please." Smithson, it appeared, lived in Camberwell, a long way out of Jamieson's road. However, he decided he must go and see him after he had finished with Brinsley unless he found in his rooms sufficient evidence for a warrant. If the man were dining out and not returning until six-thirty there would be very little time for an interview, but before he went to Notting Hill Gate Jamieson had to call at the Yard. He considered that he had sufficient evidence against Brinsley to ask for a search warrant. As he travelled thither he marshalled his facts.

(1) Brinsley had left his office a full hour before his usual time and immediately after receiving a telephone call from the dead woman, who had specifically informed his brother that he had agreed to visit her at once.

(2) He had invented a fictitious telephone call from Graham of York.

(3) He had denied all previous knowledge of Mrs. Davenport, whereas he had really been her intimate friend fourteen years earlier.

(4) From the cuff of his overcoat (Jamieson blessed the rain that had made him leave it behind) was an omnibus ticket for approximately the identical time of the murder, between his laboratory and the dead woman's flat.

It seemed to Jamieson that his case was rapidily nearing completion. He trusted that his search of the flat would provide the missing links.

It was half-past six when for the third time he climbed the stairs and saw Mayes face to face. This time there was no delay. He was shown immediately into the library where Brinsley waited for him.

"I'm sorry I was too busy to see you a second time this afternoon," he said curtly. "I'm afraid now I haven't long. I'm dining out."

"I shan't delay you many minutes, I hope, Sir Denis." Jamieson's courteous tone was in marked contrast with his host's rather abrupt manner.

"I trust not. I think I've told you all I know."

"Perhaps not quite all. We are anxious to learn something of Mrs. Davenport's past life. I think I am correct in saying that you knew her rather unusually well before her husband's death."

Brinsley's face was a mask where only the eyes lived. "Is this relevant?" he questioned.

"I think so. You knew both her and her husband?"

"I did."

"Well?"

"I was a frequent visitor to the house."

"This morning you said you had met the lady at Mr. Rossiter's."

"I met her there the other day after fourteen years."

"And you wished to conceal the fact of your previous—friendship."

Into the livid face the difficult colour burned. "Isn't that comprehensible? Mrs. Davenport's trial was a most sensational one, and a great deal of mud was slung by both sides, and it stuck not only to the Courcys themselves but to those at all intimate with them. You are probably not aware that I am shortly going to be married. In the circumstances it is, I think, quite natural that I should prefer not to recall an acquaintance that could do the dead woman no service and would inevitably drag my name into unwelcome and sordid publicity."

Jamieson shook his head. "I think you would have found that candour would have served you better. Scotland Yard is very discreet. We are as anxious as private individuals to avoid unnecessary sensationalism."

"And since when," asked Denis drily, "has Scotland Yard controlled the press? No doubt its motives are as pure as mother's milk because it has no axe to grind. But you can't say the same of the papers. They'd grab a hint as wolfishly as a gutter dogs grabs garbage."

"It is unfortunate," repeated Jamieson quietly. "But perhaps now that the fact is acknowledged you will give us your further confidence. When you met

Mrs. Davenport again at Mr. Rossiter's house you renewed your acquaintance?"

"I could scarcely cut her."

"And you visited her?"

"On two occasions."

"Another point. I may say that Scotland Yard have verified certain facts concerning the deceased. It is known that she was in urgent need of funds."

Denis looked at him keenly. "Exactly how much do you fellows know?"

"We know that she was being blackmailed. It's reasonable to suppose that she turned to her oldest friends for assistance. In fact, we are aware that she asked your help."

Denis said coldly, "Mrs. Davenport has never been in receipt of a penny from me."

"But she hoped you might help her?"

He set his lips hardly. "How can I answer that?"

"She wrote to you demanding money."

"Demanding?"

"With menaces. We have a facsimile of part of the letter, taken from her blotting-paper. She had, I think, letters of yours on which she placed a certain price?"

Denis knew when he was beaten. Further denial was useless; the fellow had him in a cleft stick. "May I ask how much of this is going to be featured in the daily press?" he said.

"Nothing more than is vitally necessary to the conduct of the case. Reporters, I'm afraid, are an inevitable trimming in such affairs."

"Damn them!" whispered Denis very low. He

had a vision of the front page of the penny dailies displaying photographs of himself, of Mrs. Davenport with the Colonel inset, of Lucille Tudor, "the heiress who was engaged to marry Sir Denis Brinsley" (automatically he changed the tense). The picture was bitter as Marah.

Jamieson was going inexorably into the matter still.

"That, I think, is so?"

"What? Oh, the letters? Yes. She was being blackmailed by some hound."

"She should have come to us. No names would have been made public."

"I imagine that a woman in her delicate position feels a little shy of the police."

Jamieson shrugged slightly. "Then—she was being blackmailed, and she turned to you for help, that you were unable to give her. On the day before her death she wrote to you imploring you to aid her, telling you it was the last chance—or rather, that you had one more chance?"

"No, nothing of the kind. . . ." He stopped short suddenly. Jamieson was on to him like a hawk on a fieldmouse.

"You mean . . .?"

Denis said slowly, "It's true she wrote to me on the day before her death but I can't tell you what was in the letter because I didn't read it."

"You didn't read it?"

"No, I destroyed it unread as soon as I got it."

"And why? It sounds a rather rash thing to do in all the circumstances."

"Because that matter was finished."

"Finished! You mean your connection with Mrs. Davenport was irrevocably severed. But how is that possible except through death, and at that time the fact of her death was not known to anyone but the murderer?"

"I mean that I had written to her the previous day saying that I could not discuss her terms further and that she must now do as she thought fit."

"And you were so sure of the result that you could destroy her letter unread?"

"I didn't propose to start the question all over again. We should never have got any forrader, but have gone on arguing and debating until we met ourselves going to bed."

"And so," repeated the detective in peculiar tones, "you considered the matter closed between you and you burned her letter. Now, coming to the day of her death, she telephoned you asking you to go and see her. And you went?"

"I've already told you I did not."

"Then can you explain how this comes to be in the sleeve of your coat?" He opened his hand to show the green omnibus-ticket. Denis sat very still, staring at it. "No," he said stupidly, "I can't. Where did you find it?"

"In the cuff of your overcoat."

"I expect it was my brother's. No, of course it wasn't. He doesn't wear a coat all through the winter. But when did you find it?"

"I came here this morning to see your servant, and he left me standing in the hall."

"And you took the opportunity. . . I'm sorry

not to be able to help you there, but I know nothing of that."

"This ticket carries a passenger from Griffiths Square to Oxford Circus, said Jamieson steadily. "The bus on which it was issued passed Oxford Circus at six o'clock."

"I thought the doctors decided that Mrs. Davenport was murdered before then."

"Approximately it dovetails."

Denis got up. "Is there anything else? I ought to dress now. I have a dinner engagement I can't possibly miss." He was taking Lucille out, as Jamieson immediately realised.

"There is one more point in connection with the telephone call from Mr. Graham. I think you said he threatened to invade your laboratory immediately?"

"Yes."

"And you warned him off?"

"Yes, I said I had to go out."

"You say he was speaking from London?"

"Where else?" questioned Denis in scornful amazement.

Jamieson enlightened him. "I've just been speaking to him up at York. He hasn't been near London for weeks."

A kind of speechless despair seemed to have seized his companion. He sounded almost apathetic as he returned, "I'm sorry. I can only repeat that a man rang up saying he was Graham. . . ."

"You recognised the voice?"

"How can one be sure of voices on a telephone? You must know yourself how it distorts tones. As

a matter of fact I had heard from him saying he expected to be down this week or next, so I wasn't much surprised."

"In the circumstances," Jamieson told him unemotionally, "I must ask you to let me examine your flat. I have here a search warrant for that purpose. You will realise that the position is unsatisfactory. I don't wish to detain you but my man—he is outside there on the pavement—must ensure that nothing is touched."

For a moment it seemed as though Denis would explode into furious abuse. Whatever he had imagined from the conversation he clearly had never suspected this climax. The humiliation of the position was overwhelming. After that first unguarded moment, however, he caught back his dignity as a man re-settles a cloak blown away by the wind.

"I will tell my servant to give you all facilities. I can't do much harm in my bath. And—I have no working knowledge of the methods of Scotland Yard—but I will leave the contents of my pockets on the table for you to examine at leisure." He laid a few innocuous articles on the writing-table, one or two letters, a penknife, a book of stamps, a handkerchief, two old envelopes covered with scribbled memoranda, regarding which he said austerely 'Those are valuable,' some loose coppers and small silver, a purse. Jamieson noticed he didn't empty his breast pocket.

"That," explained Denis in answer to the other man's question, one hand gripping the edge of the table, "is a letter from Miss Tudor." He pulled it out suddenly and showed him the address. "You

have seen Mrs. Davenport's writing? It isn't at all like this."

"May I compare that with the writing on the enclosure?"

Denis took the letter from the envelope and showed him the signature. Lucille Tudor. It was an idiosyncrasy of hers to sign her surname even when she wrote to him. Denis secretly hated it.

"Thank you," said Jamieson and Denis put the letter away again and went into the hall where Mayes was interviewing Martin, who had come upstairs in response to a signal from the window where the detective was standing.

"Mayes, this gentleman wishes to examine the flat. See that everything is unlocked and open to him. I shall be here myself for the next half-hour if anything of consequence arises."

Mayes, outwardly imperturbable, inwardly a potential murderer, said "Yes, sir," and then Denis disappeared and Jamieson began his search in the library. If letters had passed between the two as Jamieson knew they had, Brinsley had had the good sense to destroy them as soon as read. There was not a scrap of paper in any drawer or on any shelf that connected the dead woman with the tenant of the flat. In one of the drawers he found a chequebook; he looked rapidly through the counterfoils. The amounts on the whole were small, with one large sum paid to a Bond Street jeweller, clearly on Lucille's account. But if he had been lying when he said he had given nothing to Helen Davenport he had covered his tracks remarkably well. These cheques to "Self" varied from two to ten pounds;

the larger amounts were for rates, rent, scientific instruments or text-books. Nowhere was there a record of a bearer cheque of anything like the proportions Mrs. Davenport would require, while a hasty totalling of those for the past two months came to an almost negligible sum. He looked in vain for the pass-book and decided to visit the bank the following morning, if necessary. But if his search had been thus far disappointing he was amply rewarded for his scrupulous exactitude when he came to the blotter. It was extraordinary, he reflected, how many criminals had been caught by the simple ruse of holding a mirror over blotting paper. They seemed to imagine that blotting paper was like the sphinx or the grave, holding all secrets; just as they never seemed to realise that a typewriter may be as sound a clue as hand-writing. Lying among the scattered papers on the desk was a slip of blotting paper, smaller than the other sheets, and clearly torn out of a writing-pad. It had been a good deal used, but in one corner several words were either visible or easy to construe. They were of a very startling nature.

. . . l m . . der yo . . s y . . . . dere . you . wretche . . . sband . . less you send the le . . ers to me a . onc. Rem . . . . r I still . . ve pro . f t . . . could . . . . roy you . . . . bi . I . . all no . . . . itat . if . . cessa . .

Jamieson wrote it out on a sheet of paper.

I will murder you as you murdered your wretched husband unless you send the letters to me at once. Remember I still

have proof that could destroy your alibi. I shall not hesitate if necessary.

Here was evidence indeed. It had appeared to Jamieson on a careful reading of the case that the evidence against Mrs. Courcy had been very strong and it was chance rather than any show of innocence that had secured her acquittal. The proving of the alibi had seemed to him an especially tricky piece of work. Mrs. Courcy had been seen in the cheap seats of a music-hall, and recognised by the dress she wore! By some miracle no one appeared to have thought that she might have given the dress away, though the mention of cheap seats should have enlightened any psychologist. For when had Helen Davenport been content to sit below the salt? There was no doubt in his mind that there had, in fact, been an anonymous lover in the affair, who might or might not have been an accomplice. Now apparently, the two were at each other's throats, she threatening him with ruin, he her with death. Of course, apart from all sentimental reasons, a man so poor and ambitious as Denis Brinsley would not wish to take any risks of losing a wealthy bride.

There was on the desk a small stack of memoranda prepared by the scientist on various occasions, clipped together by a bulldog grip. The topmost of these Jamieson loosened and went through the formality of comparing the handwriting with that on the blotting-paper. Allowing for the haste in which the former had been scrawled they tallied precisely, and although he was not a hand-writing expert he felt reasonably sure that they were identical.

However, he decided to pass this matter to the experts at the Yard, and for this purpose he needed something in Brinsley's writing that he could take away with him, preferably in ink. He could see nothing in the room beyond the notes which were clearly important and could not be removed, and he decided to ask the man to write down something when he came in on his way to his engagement. At that moment Denis reappeared. Lucille seemed to have had educated him sartorially, for as he paused a moment in the doorway he might have stood to distant generations as "Model of English gentleman dining out—period 1926." He asked politely but distantly, "Anything I can do to help you? I propose to sleep at my club, so that I shall leave you a clear field."

"There's no need to do that," Jamieson protested.

"You'll find me there from midnight onwards if you want me. I believe they shut the club about one, but I daresay an hour will be all you need."

"Do you mind writing down the name of the club, and also where you can be found between now and midnight. May I lend you my pen?" He had seen Denis' gaze pass to the propelling pencil that lay on his desk.

Denis said levelly, "If you want a specimen of my hand-writing why not ask for it outright? I'm scarcely likely to take offence at this stage."

Stooping over the table he wrote down the name of the restaurant where he would dine, the theatre to which he was taking Lucille, and the address of her guardian, with whom he would probably stay and

have a drink after he had taken the girl home. Then he added the name of the club, signed the whole, and added the date, "in case" he observed gravely, "you want to compare figures."

Even Jamieson's imperturbability was a little shaken by his manner; for a moment he wished someone else had the job. That mood passed, however, and he went into the hall to the stand where the blue coat still hung. He carried this into the library, where the light was better. The coat was of fine blue face cloth with a half-belt. There were no marked peculiarities about it; the name of the tailor—Sandringham and Rhys—was guarantee of its quality. On the under side of the right sleeve, however, he found a curious black patch where the nap appeared to have worn completely off. It struck Jamieson as odd; a coat worn perpetually at the desk tends to get shiny in the lower sleeve, but this was an overcoat. He examined it more closely with a lens, and saw that the damage was due to burning. Now, there is no very simple way of burning the under-side of a cuff except by holding it over a flame, and such opportunities do not occur frequently. But, piecing this burn together with the pile of ashes in the grate, Jamieson felt that a fairly definite case might be made out against the coat's owner. He rang for Mayes.

"I want to ask you a question or two about last Monday evening. Sir Denis came home about seven?"

"Yes, sir."

"He came in here?"

"No, sir. He spoke to Mr. Richard, who was in

the dining-room, and then went straight upstairs to dress."

"He didn't come in here at all?"

"No, sir. He was rather late."

"And when he came back the second time?"

"Second time?"

"From his dinner engagement."

"At about half-past ten, sir."

"He came in here and wrote a letter?"

"No, sir. He had a bad headache and went up to bed."

"He wrote letters up there perhaps?"

"I don't think so. I took him up a cup of coffee at his request twenty minutes later and he drank it while I waited and asked me to put out the light."

"That's strange. But perhaps he has a fire in his bedroom?"

"A fire, sir?"

"Yes. He destroyed certain papers either on Monday night or on Tuesday. I took it for granted that he destroyed them in here, but of course . . ."

"He tore up one letter, sir, up in his room on Monday night."

"Oh? A blue letter?" For he had seen Mrs. Davenport's note-paper standing on her writing-table.

"Yes, sir."

"From Mrs. Davenport?"

Mayes froze. "I couldn't say, sir."

"Of course not. I'm afraid that isn't the one I mean."

"I don't know of any others, sir."

"On oath?"

"On oath."

"Then he must have destroyed them in his laboratory." (But he knew that was impossible. For he couldn't have got hold of the letters until Monday night and he didn't wear the coat on Tuesday.) Obviously he had burned the letters in Mrs. Davenport's flat, since there was no sign of them anywhere now.

He was interrupted by Mayes. "Is that all, sir?"

"Not quite. Do you valet Sir Denis?"

"Yes, sir. There isn't a great deal, of course. . . ."

"Just a question of brushing clothes and so forth. By the way that's a nasty burn he's got on his cuff."

"A burn, sir?"

"Yes. Here." He spread out the sleeve and Mayes bent over it in real distress.

"I don't remember that," he said thoughtfully. "Quite recent, that is."

"Pity," murmured Jamieson preparatory to letting the subject drop. "Perhaps it's been there sometime, though, and you haven't noticed it."

"No, sir, I should have noticed it, I'm sure. I always look at his cuffs in case he's put tickets in 'em."

"A habit of his? I admit I always do the same myself."

"Yes, sir." Mayes lost interest and remembered who the intruder was. "Do you wish to examine Sir Denis' room, sir?" he questioned. "Or can I clear it?"

"I'm going in there now. I'll let you know as soon as the room can be touched."

On a chair were the clothes Denis Brinsley had

discarded. In a wardrobe were one or two disreputable suits that he wore during holidays or when he went country walking. The room was extraordinarily bare and poorly furnished; the drawers had underclothes and socks and collars and handkerchiefs; to Jamieson, who had made many such examinations, it was the wardrobe of an austere and rather poverty-stricken man.

"His tailor won't grow fat," he reflected. "I should imagine Miss Tudor's money will be unusually welcome. The only expensive things he had so far encountered in the flat had been some books in the library and one or two pictures on these walls. The room yielded nothing in the way of evidence. The detective hadn't supposed it would. Calling Mayes he turned towards the dining-room; here again he anticipated little of interest. For Denis was not a professional criminal, if criminal indeed he was, and it is only the hardened "lag" who knows that the safest place to hide things is in the most obvious. This room appeared to be used a good deal by the brothers and probably by their friends, so that anything of a secret nature would be kept either at the laboratory or in the library. Yet it was here that he was destined to find the most startling and incongruous piece of evidence in the whole chain. Standing near the fireplace was a small oak table supporting papers and magazines. Half-covered by these was a black leather case; it might have been full of documents, but as he cleared the papers off the top Jamieson realised that it was a typewriter. A portable Harding, he saw, as he snapped open the cover. It had seen a certain amount of wear, but

was still in a serviceable condition. He glanced round for some paper to slip in it to test the type. A pad of cheap white lined paper lay close by; Jamieson tore off a page. He typed rapidly:

This is a specimen of the type done on this machine. This is a portable Harding Typewriter, No. XZ. 00098. It is the property of Sir Denis Brinsley of 27, Enderby Mansions, Notting Hill Gate, W. 11.

He took the sheet out of the machine and examined it carefully. The type was very black and clean; obviously the typewriter was carefully kept. There was no speck of dust on it anywhere.

"Whoever uses this takes a lot of care of it," he reflected. "And it's been used pretty recently or it would show marks of dust."

Then he saw something else, something so amazing that even he, used as he was to unexpected clues, gasped with surprise. *The 'd' was élite type whereas all the other letters were pica!* Jamieson had brought with him one of the specimens of the typewriting found in Mrs. Davenport's bureau. Now he compared the two. Except that one was pale and the other dark they were identical!

"Well, of all the grim ironies! This beats anything I've ever struck. Here's a man blackmailing a woman for cash and she, not knowing who it is who's after her, turns to him for help."

A very pretty revenge on the part of the high gods! Of course it wouldn't occur to Brinsley that he would be suspected of blackmail, which to Jamieson's thinking was a worse crime than murder. How

sold the fellow must have been when he called on the wretched woman and was instantly beset for funds. Jamieson chuckled in rather an unpleasant way. Any scrap of sympathy he had hitherto felt for the man had evaporated now.

"So he was the man with the black beard, after all," he ruminated. "Pretty dangerous playing the triple role of blackmailer, lover and murderer. But it's not surprising he went there incog. Plenty of people might have been glad to whisper to Miss Tudor that he didn't spend all his spare time at the laboratory. I don't for a moment suppose she realised he was dunning her for money. There won't, of course, be any trace of the beard here now." He decided that he must, in the light of this new evidence, make a particularly meticulous examination of everything in the flat. Denis might have hidden the beard among his brother's things, choosing some place that wouldn't be disturbed for months. But before doing that he rang for the long-suffering Mayes.

"How long has Sir Denis had this typewriter? I suppose it is his."

"I couldn't say exactly, sir. Several weeks."

"Only weeks?"

"Two months or so, I think."

"You don't remember exactly?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Did he buy it?"

"I couldn't tell you, sir. He brought it in one evening."

"It wasn't a new one?"

"No, sir."

"You've never seen it before?"

"Never."

"Open, I mean? You've seen it shut, of course."

"That wouldn't help me, sir. I wouldn't know if it was new or not. I don't know anything about those things."

"Still, I suppose you could see if the enamel was scratched?"

Mayes preserved an obstinate silence.

"You didn't notice?"

"No, sir."

"He might have brought it from his laboratory, of course," Jamieson mused.

"I couldn't tell you, sir."

"Has he ever had a man here to attend to it since he brought it home?"

"No, sir."

"Are you never out of the flat?"

"Not often, sir."

"Suppose a man came to repair the machine while you were away?"

"He wouldn't get in."

"Might not Sir Denis or his brother admit him?"

Mayes' scorn was self-evident. "No, sir." He added, "I'm only out in the evenings and sometimes of a Sunday. No mechanic comes then." Which, Jamieson was forced to concede, seemed probable.

He had just dismissed the man when he heard a latch-key and Dick came in. He spoke to the servant in the hall and Mayes whispered something far too low to be overheard even by trained ears. But he could hear Dick's comment. "Good God! What a hound!"

He came instantly to the door. "Mr. Brinsley, perhaps you could spare me five minutes."

"Certainly." Dick dropped his overcoat into Mayes' attentive arms and shut the dinning-room door behind him.

"About this typewriter. Can you tell me exactly when your brother brought this home?"

"Not the precise date. I was away at the time, up north for my people for a fortnight. When I came home it was here."

"He didn't make any comment, say he just bought it or had it lent him?"

"No. I asked him if he didn't do enough work at his laboratory and he said that sometimes one wanted to put down a memorandum in a hurry to send away and no one could read his villainous writing. Which is quite true. I can't myself."

"Did he bring it from Griffiths Square?"

"I couldn't tell you. His secretary might know."

"You never used it?"

Dick seemed slightly embarrassed. "No."

"Did Sir Denis seem anxious to keep it for his own particular use?"

"I don't know why you should ask that, but as a matter of fact he has that feeling about a typewriter that some men have about a fountain pen, that only one person should use it."

"You asked for the loan of it?"

"Yes. I believe it's quite a common feeling among the owners of machines."

"He told you so?"

"He didn't exactly refuse, but I could see he

wasn't keen, so I asked him if he felt like that and he said he did."

"It struck you as odd?"

"Only because as a rule Sir Denis likes sharing everything he has."

"I see. Did he use it much?"

"A certain amount, I believe. Of course, I was often out in the evenings, so I can't tell you much."

"I see. You never heard him speak of having it repaired?

"Never."

"Thank you. You can't give me even the approximate date when he brought it back here? You can perhaps remember when you were in the north?"

"The beginning of September, for about a fortnight."

"Thank you. I think that's all you can tell me."

"Aren't you," suggested Dick politely, preparatory to shooing his visitor out of the flat, "rather wasting your time barking up the wrong tree?"

"No time is wasted if it helps us to run our man to earth," returned Jamieson pedantically.

"Even when it's spent on someone who has no connection with the murder?"

"The process of elimination is an inevitable one, Mr. Brinsley," and he added immediately, "I'm afraid I haven't quite finished yet."

"Damn the fellow!" exclaimed Dick as the detective went back to Brinsley's bedroom, "how long has he been here, Mayes?"

"Hours," said Mayes bitterly.

"Sir Denis won't be pleased to know he's been

ransacking his possessions. Who the devil lets him do that anyway?"

He's got a search warrant. And Sir Denis was here when he began."

"What? A warrant? Oh, the fellow's off his tile. Poor old Scotland Yard. He isn't really dreaming of capturing the murderer red-handed in this flat?"

"I couldn't say, sir," returned Mayes gloomily, going back to the kitchen. Dick wandered along the corridor and paused to see what this madman was doing now. Apparently he was redoubling his search efforts, going carefully through every wardrobe and box in the flat, both Dick's and his brother's. Dick smothered a furious protest. Carefully Jamieson unfolded every garment, explored old boxes, even went sheet by sheet through drawers of writing materials, in case the bill for the beard should have been thrust among them. But he found nothing. He was not disappointed; on the morrow, he decided, he would find out whether the Yard's two men had discovered anything from the wig-makers. He would have to go down to the laboratory, too, though he didn't expect to learn anything there. Looking up from a drawer he was examining he saw Dick's reflection in the mirror and said smoothly, "I'm afraid I'm at a stage now where you can't help me, Mr. Brinsley." Dick, colouring deeply, went away to join Mayes in the kitchen. He found him whispering virulent oaths that were just audible.

"Bet you three days' pay I can beat you at that game," he said promptly. For five minutes the competition was so keen that they both forgot the man

at the other end of the flat. Then Dick gracefully and admiringly left Mayes alone in the field.

"Where did you learn those last two?" he asked curiously. "They sound like San Francisco Third Circle."

But Mayes suddenly discovered something pressing to be done in the diminutive scullery and Dick thrust his hands into his pockets and whistled softly as he went back to his own room to continue his invective there.

"Rum cove!" he reflected, "wonder where Denis really found him. Is this brute going to stay all night?"

But though he might rant and rave and call the detective a blundering ass there was a very genuine fear in his own mind as to the result of all this thorough investigation; not that he thought for an instant Denis was guilty, but appearances were devilish black, and juries were fools. That damned woman, of course! He was perfectly ready to believe she'd murdered her husband.

Mayes, beneath his swiftly-resumed mask of imperturbability, felt just the same.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VERDICT

1

THERE was nothing for Jamieson to do that night but leave the blotting-paper and the notes made by Brinsley in the detective's presence with the Handwriting Expert at the Yard and await his report. But he was abroad early next day. The inquest was to be held immediately after lunch and he must gather in all his evidence by noon. His first visit was to Miss Margetson, whom he found desultorily sorting papers in the outer room of the laboratory. She was definitely hostile and greeted him curt and unsmiling.

"Good morning. I understood, Miss Margetson, that Sir Denis has a portable typewriter?"

She hesitated. He was sure she suspected a trap and would willingly mislead him if she thought that thereby she could serve her employer's interests.

After a pause she said "Has he?"

"Yes. He used to keep it here, I think?"

"If he did I never saw it. And I don't see how he could have hidden it."

"Oh, there's no question he had it. It was found at his house."

"Then if it was at his house how could it be here?"

"He may just have taken it home."

"I don't think so. Why should he want one here? I'm always on the spot to type things for him."

"When you are gone—or perhaps ill . . ."

"I'm never ill; and I always take a holiday when he does. And if he wants to type after I've gone there's this machine."

"Do you know if he could type?"

"Yes. He said he could. I never saw him."

"Ah! Do you make out his cheques?"

"Nearly always."

"Has he made out a cheque within the past three months for a typewriter, new or second-hand?"

"No."

"You'd recognise the name if he had?"

"Yes, I should."

"I suppose he might have made it out himself?"

"He might, of course. But I keep all his accounts for him. It isn't likely."

"I see. Now, as a matter of form, I have to search the laboratory. I should like to have a clear field for, say, half an hour."

Miss Margetson, fear knocking at her heart too, but scorn on her loyal lips, went down to the basement where certain of the old files were kept, and Jamieson started his work forthwith, but with no result. He insisted on seeing all the private letter files, and examining the locked drawers of Denis' desk, but he was forced to own himself defeated. No whit disturbed, however, he left the laboratory and went to the head office of the Harding Typewriter Company where he was immediately shown into the manager's room. To him he said that he was an official of Scotland Yard trying to trace a machine

that was believed to be connected with a serious crime.

"You will realise that at this stage I cannot say more," he explained. "This is a highly confidential matter, and I hope it will not go further than these four walls, at this stage of the development at all events."

"That," said Mr. Bartell, "is understood."

"The machine is a Portable Harding," Jamieson went on,"No XZ00098. I should think some years old. I believe it was recently bought second-hand. Possibly your sales lists could show that."

"They certainly should. I'll send a clerk down to inspect them." He rang the bell and arranged for this to be done at once. "Yes, that machine would be three or four years old. You have to remember, though, that if it was bought second-hand within the last three months it may quite easily have come into the possession of—your client?" he hesitated, but Jamieson made no comment and he went on, "through some other agency. We do not always agree to take over second-hand machines; in fact, there was a time shortly after the war when the market was flooded with worn and built-up typewriters, owing to the closing down of Government departments, when we refused even quite good machines because we had more on our hands than we could undertake to sell. You realise, of course, that there are numbers of agencies through which second-hand machines are sold."

"I quite realise that. The machine would originally be sold through you?"

"Yes. Of course, it may have been supplied to the order of some provincial or north-country branch and in that case we should not know who actually purchased it. And it's quite possible that they don't keep full record. Or many people, again, buy these machines as presents, and in any case one may pass through half-a-dozen hands in as many years."

The detective agreed and then the clerk came back to say that there was no record of such a machine having been received at the head office.

"Do you know for a fact if the machine was repurchased in London?" queried Bartell.

"I know nothing for certain," rejoined the detective sombrely, and bidding his man good morning and further requesting silence he came out into the busy bleakness of the city.

Leaving Hardings' office Jamieson went straight to the Yard where he learned that his specimens of handwriting had been examined and found identical. He further enquired about the beard, only to learn that nothing had so far been traced. It was now half-past twelve, and the inquest was fixed for two o'clock. Jamieson considered the wisdom of tackling Brinsley and facing him with the newly-acquired evidence before he was put in the witness-box, but when he telephoned Notting Hill Gate he was told that he was out and Miss Margetson could throw no light on his whereabouts. There was, therefore, nothing to be done now but await developments, and these were speedy enough.

2

Both Grain and Voisey as well as the Brinsleys had received summonses to attend the inquest, and these two arrived in excellent time. Dick came just as the hour struck, but Denis was nearly ten minutes late. He apologised briefly, and took his seat without realising that he had already prejudiced the official atmosphere by his tardiness. The case had been kept out of the papers as far as possible, and the number of curiosity-mongers was mercifully small. After the formality of identification Voisey entered the box and gave evidence as to the finding of the body. He was inwardly extremely nervous lest the coroner should touch on the delicate question of his relations with the dead woman, but fortunately the point was either considered irrelevant or did not occur to Authority, and he stepped down into the court again with a sigh of relief.

Grain's evidence was shorter still, and chiefly noteworthy for an irritable outbreak in the middle of a prosy dissertation by the coroner.

"Good God, sir!" he barked. Do you realise I was going to paint the woman?" There was a subdued titter in the body of the court and then they let Grain go and Dick was called. He repeated tersely his version of the telephone calls he had already offered Jamieson.

"She said nothing when she telephoned the second time, nothing as to your brother's intentions?" insisted the coroner, a grim clean-shaved bulldog of a man with an intimidating manner that gave the impression that in no circumstances would he let so

juicy a bone go until he had sucked every fragment from its marrow.

"She thanked me for giving her the number and said she had got through."

"She didn't, for instance, say whether Sir Denis had undertaken to go or not?"

"I think my brother is in the court and can tell you himself what Mrs. Davenport said."

The coroner noted the evasion with inward triumph. "Your brother was not at your end of the telephone at that time. Allow me to remind you that you are in the witness-box at the moment."

"And I have given my evidence. I have nothing more to add. Mrs. Davenport said she had got through and it was quite all right."

"By which you understood?"

"That it was quite all right."

"Which means?"

"That whatever she had telephoned my brother about was satisfactorily cleared up."

Rather to the surprise of the court he was allowed to return to his seat, and Denis Brinsley took his place.

For a time the evidence followed closely on the lines of Jamieson's first cross-examination. But when he said conclusively that he had not been near Pontifex Mansions on the fatal Monday evening he was again confronted with the ticket, and again denied all knowledge of it. Nothing could shake him, but his testimony went for little against that unanswerable evidence. The case against him was a foregone conclusion when the sheet of blotting-paper was produced.

"I understand that Mrs. Davenport had certain letters of yours that she was anxious you should buy back at a generous price?"

"She had certain letters I suggested she should either destroy or return to me."

"And she did so?"

"She had not returned them to me at the time of her death."

"Or destroyed them?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"You have not seen them since your second meeting, at Mr. Rossiter's house?"

"I have not."

"Can you account for the fact that they are nowhere to be found?"

"Only by suggesting that she did eventually get rid of them."

"By burning them?"

"Possibly."

"Those letters were of considerable value to you?"

"No man likes any record of his folly to be perpetuated."

"I suggest that if those letters had fallen into certain hands they might materially affect your position?"

"As a scientist?"

"Perhaps."

Denis shook his head. "I think that unlikely. A scientist's reputation depends almost wholly on his work. Like any other artist."

"Then shall we say socially?"

"Social considerations bear little weight with me."

"But possibly their publication would affect your position as the *fiancé* of Miss Tudor?"

Denis' hands closed fiercely on the edge of the witness-box. "Is it necessary to go into that?"

"Of course. From the letter the deceased sent you it seems obvious that she was demanding money with menaces, such menaces being threats to send the letters to Miss Tudor. In fact, on the day before her death she said so quite clearly. You recall the letter?"

"I destroyed it unread."

The coroner arched his brows, but he could get out of the witness nothing more meaty than the reason he had already given Jamieson. He next went back to the time of the Courcy trial.

"At that period you were frequently Mrs. Davenport's guest?"

"Colonel Courcy's."

"And you repaid his hospitality by a clandestine correspondence with his wife?"

Denis said nothing.

"I put it to you that you were infatuated with Mrs. Courcy?"

"That appears to me wholly irrelevant. The letters in question were what would be called love-letters couched, no doubt, in highly extravagant language. I was naturally anxious that they should not be made public."

"There was nothing more in them than that?"

Denis said drily, "That seems to be quite enough."

"There wasn't, for instance, anything that might conceivably have had any bearing on Colonel

Courcy's death? You had, I think, at the time of the trial certain information that might have altogether changed the verdict, information you did not see fit to disburse to the police?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about. I'm not a lawyer but I should suppose these questions to be both irrelevant and highly unfair. The trial of Mrs. Davenport fourteen years ago does not enter into this case at all. . . ."

"I think you are wrong. I will quote from your own letter and the jury shall judge for themselves.

I will murder you as you murdered your wretched husband unless you return the letters to me at once. Remember I still have proof that could destroy your alibi and I shall not hesitate to use it if necessary.

Denis met his gaze with contemptuous disgust. "That's no part of any letter of mine."

"It is an impression found in your blotting-pad. The writing has been identified as yours. We know that Mrs. Davenport had written a threatening letter asking for money twenty-four hours earlier. It is a fact that you could prove Mrs. Davenport's guilt?"

"I shouldn't dream of writing such stuff to any woman, if only for the sake of my own well-being. The man who commits himself like that in writing is mad."

"Then you did not suggest to Mrs. Davenport that she was actually guilty of the murder?"

"I never wrote to her on the subject at all."

The natural instinct of the scientist for the austere

simplicities of truth made him a poor deceiver. His attempt at prevarication was immediately discovered by the coroner, an astute and zealous man who perceived that he had but to phrase his question differently to receive a less negative answer.

"During your conversations with Mrs. Davenport you never once hinted that you could have produced evidence to prove her guilt?"

"I couldn't," he said gently.

"That is not the point. Did you ever suggest it?"

"I considered that she was fortunate in her counsel, and once said as much."

"You said nothing more positive?" Kindly answer yes or no. Did you ever tell the deceased that you could destroy her alibi if you chose?"

"I decline to pursue this line of evidence. I am certain that no lawyer would allow it. The unfortunate affair of more than a dozen years ago should be regarded as decently buried. Mrs. Davenport was acquitted, and that should close the matter."

The coroner, looking suddenly Pecksniffian, said, "I would draw the attention of the jury to the fact that you refuse to deny the suggestion. In the circumstances, which of course include this letter, I think it would be reasonable to conclude that you were aware of Mrs. Davenport's guilt and allowed her to know it. At all events you knew that she was being blackmailed?"

"She told me so."

"And showed you the letters?"

"She showed me a series of anonymous threats . . ."

"That is what I mean. Perhaps you can explain how it happens that the machine on which those were typed is now in your possession?"

Possibly he anticipated a dramatic outburst or a fierce denial; he got neither. Denis stood speechless as if that last sentence had slain him upon his feet. A man suddenly paralysed sometimes has that appearance of walking death. His face was white as paper and in contrast the deep blue eyes looked black. It was obvious to Jamieson that he did not reply, not because he had nothing to urge, but because he had reached a condition where speech was physically impossible. One or two people looked a little uncomfortable. This was not melodrama; this was tragedy. They didn't like it.

When at last the coroner repeated the question Denis moved. His expression changed a little; like water beginning to flow again beneath ice life came back to his face. The impassive mask broke up; his mouth was twisted as if by some intolerable pain. "I can't explain that," he said. But the stricken iron look did not alter; that was not fear, it was agony, and even the coroner felt a little shaken.

"I understand the typewriter is in court. You can identify it?"

"Is that necessary?" The voice was like that of a ghost, hollow, sounding only one note. "If it has been taken from my flat the inference is obvious."

"For formality's sake . . . This is the machine."

It was passed up to him; he gave one look at it and nodded.

"You have had it—how long?"

"Thirteen weeks."

"You remember the actual day you bought it?"

"September 6th."

"And where did you get it?"

"It was—given me."

"By whom?"

"A friend."

"His name?

Denis hesitated. "Is it necessary?" he repeated. "Must he be mixed up in this wretched affair too?"

"No blame will attach to him. His name?"

"Weyman—Tristram Weyman."

"And his address?"

"He's just sailed for Africa."

"The name of the boat?"

"I don't know. I didn't go and see him off."

"The line?"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry."

"Perhaps you can give me his home address?"

Denis looked infinitely harassed. "I might if I had my notebook here. I never remember addresses. Somewhere in Hampstead, I remember. As a matter of fact, he gave me that machine because he couldn't take it abroad."

"It seems just the sort of thing he would find useful."

"He was buying a new one." In his head a red-hot wheel was turning—turning—he must keep control of himself just a little longer; a slip now might be fatal. He wondered if they believed his yarn about Weyman and if Weyman would mind. Presently that wheel would be fully sprung and then he would be at rest. Jamieson scribbled something on a slip of paper and passed it to Martin who ac-

companied him and who immediately slipped away. The coroner continued his inexorable cross-examination of the dazed and white-faced man in the witness-box. At last the inquisition was over. Denis stumbled back to his seat. The audience gaped and thrilled and muttered. Denis Brinsley sat like a stone, aware of nothing that was going on round him. But presently he heard Jamieson say, "I am waiting for some information that may have a direct bearing on certain of the evidence given here to-day. Perhaps the court may wait a little longer."

The coroner resumed his seat; the jury relaxed. It was going to be easy, after all, not one of those awful protracted affairs where you argued and considered and persuaded, and in the end woke up sweating in the night wondering if an innocent man had suffered through your negligence or apathy.

There was an extraordinary stillness in the court. People sat like little silhouettes cut out of stiff cardboard, not moving; even the faint murmur of comment and hazard had died down. Denis sat a little apart from the rest. He compelled general attention. Once again he was impenetrable; but who knew what anguish that impenetrability hid? Grain was furtively sketching the fine-drawn tense profile on the back of an envelop, his professional instinct drowning all motives of decency; he forgave all those connected with the abominable affair because of the opportunity it yielded him to take a silver-point impression of that thin face, eyes blind, nerves taut as a fiddle-string, thin surgeon's hands folded over one another in a grip like iron; all life seemed concentrated in those hands; it had drained out of the face; the eyes

saw nothing; the body was stiff as death. But the hands, quivering faintly because of their close fierce grip—they lived. They held Grain spell-bound.

Martin came back and whispered something into Jamieson's ear. The detective rose.

"I have had enquiries made," he said, addressing the coroner. "The Harding Typewriting Company tell me they have never sold a machine to a man of that name. It is true that such a man sailed for Africa on the Windsor Castle early in September: his address has been traced and his house telephoned, and I am informed that he never possessed a typewriter and never expressed any desire for one. Finally, he and the last witness have not met at Mr. Weyman's house since last August, and could not, therefore, have had any such transaction as has been suggested."

Grain was watching the suspected man; he had sunk back from that rigid attitude into something like relief; the line of the body was no longer firm and upright, but sagged and exhausted. Yet he did not seem so much overwhelmed by despair as he had been when he stood in the box ten minutes earlier. It might be that he was too greatly fatigued to realise his position, but Grain, no mean student of human nature, felt that that relaxed attitude indicated a corresponding relaxation of mental strain, as if the answers brought back by the constable, damning though they were, were not the worst that he had feared.

The coroner rose, addressed the jury, who filed out. They found the case puzzling, but fortunately their decision wasn't grounded on such considerations

as the origin of the typewriter. There was plenty of other evidence. It had been scarcely worth while leaving the box, they agreed. They were unanimous from the first five minutes.

Another quarter of an hour they waited—so much time they allowed for decency's sake. The foreman rose. He had a sonorous voice.

"Are you agreed, gentlemen of the jury?"

"We are."

"And your verdict is . . .?"

"We find the deceased died by being strangled, and we bring in a verdict of wilful murder against Sir Denis Brinsley."

3

When the court was cleared Denis faced Jamieson behind the scenes and asked, "Am I allowed to go home for a few minutes and collect some things?"

Now that the suspense was over he had recovered his normal balance.

Jamieson, who had brought the warrant for the arrest down to the court, said slowly, "I should have to accompany you, of course. It isn't usual . . . ."

"A taxi will get us there in a very few minutes. I should like to be sure that my memoranda will not be lost or touched while I'm temporarily unable to keep an eye on it."

A taxi drew up by the kerb and the pair got in. At the flat they met Dick and Mayes in the hall. The latter had heard the verdict and his hatred of the detective was like a fire. He took his employer's order to pack a few necessaries in a small bag with-

out delay and then the other three went into the library. Jamieson watched his prisoner gathering papers; long fine hands he had, he thought, with steady nervous fingers with spatulate tips and nails cut square above them. Not for an instant did his glance waver; but there was no thought of self-destruction or mutiny of any kind in Brinsley's thoughts. At that moment he was genuinely concerned for the safety of his work.

Just before Mayes reappeared he finished his clearing and the brothers faced one another.

"All damn' rot, of course," muttered Dick. "You'll soon be back. Can you sue the Yard for libel?" he added, turning unexpectedly to Jamieson.

"Not in these circumstances."

"I didn't think so. You fellows don't give anything away, do you? Rotten this should come just now when you're so busy and the wedding and all that. But you'll be home long before then." They shook hands and then Denis turned to his escort, said briefly but courteously, "At your service," and they went out to the waiting cab.

CHAPTER IX

A DANIEL COME TO JUDGMENT

1

"AM I allowed to have visitors here?" Denis Brinsley asked his warder an hour or two after his committal.

"Yes, sir, always supposing they can show they've a good reason for wishing to see you. If you want to make plans for y'r defence, f'r instance . . ."

"But I can't have all my old pals queueing up to tell me it's a beastly shame? I see."

"Of course, sir, if there's anyone you want to see special—a lawyer or something . . ."

Denis considered. "I think I'll wait a bit and see what they do off their own bat. Thanks for the hint all the same."

His first visitor arrived early the following morning. The warder unlocked the cell and brought in a tall fair young man, with a handsome immobile face, flawlessly tailored, exquisitely groomed, looking, as his friends brutally told him, more like an advertisement of Savile Row than a human intelligence. He had an air of detachment that immediately freed Denis from the sense of embarrassment and humiliation that had haunted him since his arrest. The newcomer seemed as much at his ease as if this cell were the library at Notting Hill Gate.

"Scott!" exclaimed Denis coming forward with an eager step and holding out his hand.

The young man, whose name was Scott Egerton and who had himself only twelve months earlier had personal experience of police procedure in murder cases, when Simon Chandos was poisoned at Freyne, glanced at the warder and spread out a remarkably capable pair of hands.

"So as to make sure I'm not sleeving a phial for your benefit," he explained to the surprise of Denis.

"To work my way through the prison bars? I thought that was only done in penny dreadfuls."

"I meant phial with a P. It's not an uncommon trick."

"I'm damned if I understand the workings of British justice. I should have thought that having gated a man they'd be rather bucked if he saved them all further trouble. Suicide is tantamount to confession, which is its great weakness."

Egerton, who was a constitutionalist by temperament, contented himself by saying austerely, "Bad principle," and immediately went on, "I came down, Denis, to see if there is anything I can do for you. I'm sorry I couldn't come yesterday but we've been pretty busy at Cattering (for which constituency he was Liberal Member) trying an interesting experiment. The farmers have lost heavily this summer and we want to finance them, not by a Government subsidy which is infernally dangerous, but by the goodwill of other industries. Localised industry is bound to die shortly. It'll have to become a communal and not an individual affair. I've been so much engaged that I haven't looked at the papers except

the political pages for several days and I only realised something was up when I saw your photograph on the front sheet of last night's edition. Rosemary and I drove down by night, and I had to spend more time getting an admission ticket."

"You're a wonderful chap, Scott. No one would imagine you'd been up all night."

Egerton let that pass. "Have you thought about your defence yet? If you're fixed up it's all serene. But you'll have to get something settled pretty soon, because they'll bring the case before the end of the Session if they can."

"Hope so, I'm sure."

"It'll be quick work, and we shall have to allow that the trial will actually take place. Of course, there's always the possibility of unearthing the actual criminal within a week, but it's fairly remote in this instance. And anyway you must give your man a chance. He hasn't got an easy job."

"Of course, you're a first-class sleuth, aren't you? You're so many perfect things one loses track of you in some fields. I know about as much of lawyers and criminal procedure as a committed linnet."

"So I supposed. Claude Arbuthnot's your best man. There isn't a brain to touch him, and he's got a fine regard for his work. For instance, he won't be satisfied to rake up enough suspicion to give you the benefit of the doubt; he won't stop till he can produce clear evidence."

"He'll be a pretty clever chap if he does that, considering the fistful of evidence the Yard have nosed out."

"There's only one chance and that is, as I've al-

ready said, to find the actual murderer. Are you prepared to accept Arbuthnot?"

"If he'll take the job on. He may agree with friend Jamieson."

Egerton shook his head. "Not he. As soon as I read the case up last night—you were most minutely reported, Denis . . . "

His companion interrupted him to ask, "Was there a photograph of anyone else?"

"Mrs. Davenport. That's all. When I read the story I sent a wire to Arbuthnot asking him to let me have the reply at my club. I found it there this morning when I arrived. Here it is." He took the orange envelope out of his pocket and passed it to Denis. The message was brief but encouraging.

Certainly. A case after my own heart.
ARBUTHNOT

"You're a good chap, Scott. I don't know what on earth . . . "

His companion interrupted him to say "I shall probably be seeing Arbuthnot later. I'll tell him to get busy."

Denis frowned suddenly. "There's one small point. Isn't he the fellow who demands and gets a guinea a word?"

"Not quite that, I think," returned Egerton woodenly.

"Don't be an ass. Aren't his fees pretty considerable?"

"I believe they're respectable."

"I, like the peasant's son of legend, am poor but

honest. It's no use my engaging the leading light of the day if I can't settle with him later."

"It's no use your engaging any other if he isn't going to win your case for you. Don't be a fool, Denis. What use will your miserable shekels be when you're buried in quicklime?"

"You're a cheerful bloke, aren't you?"

But Egerton refused to smile. "You're not doping yourself that this is going to be child's play? You're up against a pretty desperate villain, a man who knows a slip will put him in your place. He's got a tremendous advantage over you, inasmuch as he's at liberty and has seen all the cards, while you're caged and more or less in the dark. It's going to take all that Arbuthnot and his aides-de-camp can do to clear you. It's no joke, believe me."

"I wonder why," murmured Denis meditatively.

"Why he picked you out? It's fairly obvious. Because there's more motive in your case than in anyone else's. Suppose he tried to shove the blame on to Dick, for instance, the case would immediately fall to the ground. Dick never knew Mrs. Davenport; she hadn't letters of his that she used to extort blackmail. This fellow is presented with a magnificent time bomb and all he's got to do is to light the fuse. Well, he's lighted it. We've got to see it's extinguished before any worse damage is done."

"To come back to the vexed question of fees . . ."

"Oh, confound fees. You can't do Arbuthnot out of a case like this. He loves it. And anyway there's

your job. You've no right to shirk that. Don't be so infernally proud, Denis. Lucifer, you remember, fell like lightning from Heaven. There's plenty of money in the world."

Denis smiled wryly. "Baronet goes on the Guardians. Another nice caption."

Egerton took no notice of that. "Then you may expect C. A. any time, probably to-morrow. There's only one other thing." He paused, hands thrust deep into his pockets and his level gaze held his companion's. "You might as well give up the ghost as try and shade things in the smallest degree. It's what you'll want to do, of course. Both for Mrs. Davenport's sake and Miss Tudor's."

Denis started violently. "Miss Tudor's?"

"Yes. It won't be possible to keep her name utterly out of the affair. But if you have evidence that could have proved Mrs. Davenport's guilt and Arbuthnot asks for it, give it him. Don't hedge and don't be betrayed by the idiotic so-called chivalrous convention about speaking no evil of the dead. I've always thought it would be much more to the point to speak no evil of the living. The prosecution have a magnificent hand, practically a Grand Slam hand, and you'll have to play yours like a genius if you're to win. Their case will be that it was on your account the Colonel was poisoned fourteen years ago; and granted that, it isn't difficult to see the line they'll take in this affair. Arbuthnot is as secret as the grave. He won't blab all you tell him to the reporters. But you may as well refuse to defend as hide the smallest detail."

"I didn't know I had that reputation," murmured his companion interestedly.

"Your reputation for common-sense was never anything considerable," returned Egerton equably and rather unexpectedly. "It's fortunate that you're such a rotten liar."

"Suppose I don't defend?" demand Denis without warning, having followed up the line suggested by his companion's words a few moments earlier.

"Don't be funny. There isn't any time."

"I'm in earnest. Do you think I don't realise how this is going to hit at other people—people who've no earthly concern with my earlier lunacies and who haven't any right to be called upon to foot the bill . . . ?"

"It's part of the law of life that men reap where they have not sown and gather where they have not strawed. Wheat and tares alike. You're thinking of Miss Tudor again, of course."

"They may put her in the witness-box, drag everything into the light of their foul publicity. On my soul, Scott, I'd rather be dead."

"There's a short road to Heaven but you must take it young. I think you're past the age limit, Denis. I told you you were mentally deficient in everything except science."

"If I refused to defend," repeated Denis stubbornly, "at least she'd be left in peace."

"You'd get a magnificent press," his companion agreed cordially. "And so, of course, would she. She'd be pointed at for the rest of her life as the woman whose *fiancé* was accomplice in one murder and criminal in another. I once knew a man whose

father had been acquitted for murder. He never lived it down and eventually he committed suicide. Is that the sort of thing you're anxious for for her? You, of course, having taken the easy road, would sleep sweetly enough."

"Damn you!" exclaimed Denis viciously. "D'you often get kicked, Scott?"

"Infrequently. And never twice by the same boot," returned the other with his usual imperturbability. "They won't let me stay any longer now. I'll go and settle with Arbuthnot to-day. If I can get hold of him, that is. No, don't reopen the question of fees. That'll settle itself."

"Which, being interpreted, means you'll make yourself responsible."

"If Miss Tudor lets me."

"Lucille! What the devil are you driving at?"

"She has prior right, of course."

"Good Heavens, Scott, what kind of cad do you suppose I am? Do you imagine in my place you'd let a woman . . ."

"In your place," interrupted Egerton extremely drily, "I shouldn't have any choice. Here comes the fellow to tell me time's up. Remember that the only thing you can do is to stick rigidly to facts and not to wallow in morbid scruples. It isn't fair to your side. Rosemary sent her love. She wanted to send a cake, too, I think, but I was afraid they'd think it was poisoned, and I didn't see why she should entertain the warders. Good-bye for the moment. I daresay I shall be seeing you again shortly. God go with you."

By those parting words Denis realised how pro-

foundly moved was the younger man by the position. It was the first hint he had given of the keen tensity of his heart, that organ that was commonly denied him.

2

On leaving the prison Egerton hailed a taxi and was driven to the offices of Mainwaring and Arbuthnot. Mainwaring had been dead for years; Claude Arbuthnot was the grandson of the original partner. He was in appearance an imposing figure, six foot two in his socks with a great square head, eyes of a piercing blue and a good deal of white hair. His clean-shaved face was keen and alert; the lips betrayed subtlety and the high forehead intelligence; his thin fine hands expressed the nervous energy of the man; though he must have been over sixty, he had the enthusiasm and eager temper of a junior as he drew Egerton into his private room and offered him a cigar.

"Tell me," he said instantly, "you've seen him?"

"I've just come from the prison."

"Well?"

"He'll ruin himself if he can, out of a mistaken sense of decency. I warn you he has no natural sense."

"Do you know his exact connection with that woman?"

"I should think merely a young fool. He's thirty-six now. So he was twenty-two at the time of the trial. A foolish age." He spoke from experience; he had been landed in an impasse nearly as serious as Brinsley's when he was himself twenty-one.

"Well, I shall get that out of him, I suppose?"

"I hope so. I warned him to adhere rigidly to facts."

"I wonder he didn't kick you from here to Jericho."

"Fortunately, being a scientist, he doesn't prevaricate well. I take it our only chance is to deny the evidence?"

"Exactly. If Brinsley is innocent, then he's the victim of a plot. The trail of evidence is too carefully laid to please me. I'd rather he'd destroyed that bus-ticket or burned the blotting-paper. This is so conclusive as to be unnatural."

"Have you any suspicions, sir?"

"In cases like this my experience has taught me that it's always wise to enquire into the motive of the man who finds the body, in this case, two men. Do you know anything about them?"

"I know their professional reputations. The difference between them is that Grain is an artist and Voisey a commercial tout."

"Do you know anything of their private lives?"

"I don't suppose either of them would claim kinship with Galahad. I can't say more than that."

"Never a whisper linking them with Mrs. Davenport?"

"If there had been I shouldn't have heard it," retorted Egerton drily. "In any case Voisey can't have had anything to do with that murder. He's not thirty now, and men of this country don't start *la vie amoureuse* at fourteen."

"But Grain?"

"I don't know. How should I? We shall have to

get a detective, I suppose, as we did for Chandos. Fourteen years is a long time though."

"We're employing a man to do work for us, not child's play," Arbuthnot pointed out grimly. "Personally, I like a hard case. It puts me on my mettle. Just as you like 'em."

Egerton smiled wryly. "I've lost my taste for them since my friends have become implicated. Have you a theory, sir?"

"It strikes me as extremely odd that a man of Voisey's age should suggest at eight o'clock in the evening a visit to the flat of a woman many years his senior whom he has met for the first time two months earlier, and take with him a man whom she has practically never met. Even if the rumour is true that they were lovers it isn't exactly the sort of thing a young man would want to broadcast."

"I don't know," observed Egerton cynically. "It seems to me with a gentleman of that kidney it's precisely what he might like to do. I gather both he and Grain met her at Rossiter's house, and Grain partnered her."

"Then why ask a much younger man, who didn't, for an introduction unless he had reason to believe the two were intimate?"

"Because he wanted a witness?" hazarded Egerton. "Or because the other fellow wanted a witness? Feasible, I suppose."

"Of course it's feasible. Why should Voisey be so sure of his position? He wouldn't even telephone. He knew her movements pretty well. Isn't it reasonable to argue that he wouldn't telephone because he *knew* he'd get no reply?"

"Possible," said Egerton cautiously. "Are you putting Grain out of court?"

"No. I'm merely judging the pair on their merits. I consider Voisey's actions lay him open to a certain amount of suspicion. There is the point about the open door. It isn't conceivable that a murderer will leave a door open except to ensure that he can get in again later. We'll go on to consider motive. That is clearly an unpremeditated crime. Men who plan murders in advance choose a less physically repulsive death. It isn't difficult to get hold of a weapon."

"There's the likelihood of clues."

"He can always take the weapon with him. A knife or a dagger make no sound; poison even is quite feasible. But strangulation you will find, is practically always resorted to on the spur of the moment. This is, therefore, a *crime passionel.* That much will be obvious to the prosecution. Of course, they will argue that Brinsley went round to Pontifex Mansions in response to the telephonic summons, argued briefly and furiously about the letters, lost his head and murdered the woman who threatened his hopes, his ambitions and his happiness, and then burned the letters which were the only clue against him. It was ten to one against anyone discovering his previous connection with Mrs. Davenport. He wouldn't, not being either a detective or a man with a natural criminal flair, think of the blotting-paper clue; he would steal away. . . ."

"Leaving the door open?"

"He might be afraid of arousing the porter or other inmates of the flat by shutting the door firmly,

and thus put his head in the noose. I think the prosecution could dispose of that suggestion easily enough. I'm merely putting their point of view. They will prove that she wrote menacing letters to him, that he replied in a murderous strain; they have the ticket, the fact that immediately after receiving the call he went out, the faked message from Graham, and the entire absence of alibi."

"Quite so. But there's a point that strikes me as highly suspicious and that is the second telephone call to Notting Hill Gate. That makes me believe, in the face of the strongest evidence, in spite of the fact that Brinsley has a fiendish temper, though he keeps it sternly on a leash, that he actually did tell the lady he wouldn't come to her flat, and that he kept his word. Why should she trouble to telephone again if he was really coming? The obvious answer is that she wouldn't. But if he'd refused, then the second telephone call is explained. Because once the murder is discovered it's clear that Dick Brinsley will go into the witness-box and will state there that his brother had definitely promised to go to the flat. If he really was going, his presence there would be evidence enough."

"You suggest an elaborate hoax, that it was all done to provide that evidence?"

"Yes."

"But why? What would Mrs. Davenport expect to gain from that?"

Egerton looked at him queerly. "I'm not suggesting that Mrs. Davenport did telephone."

"Then who did?"

"The murderer. Let me reconstruct the affair for

you. The murderer, whom we will call A, is a man —I think we may safely say that no woman committed the actual crime, though she may have been his accomplice in blazing a false trail—a man who may have been Mrs. Davenport's lover and probably was. He may have some connection with the trial, but there's no reason to assume this. He goes to see her and they quarrel. As for motive—you may be right about Voisey being her lover, or if Voisey is actually implicated he may have discovered some other man sharing rights he thought solely his prerogative. Or there may be some other motive we can't guess. It may have to do with the letters. If it is the lover and accomplice of Colonel Courcy's murder . . ."

"That's libel," interrupted Arbuthnot sternly. "You can't assume Mrs. Davenport poisoned her husband. She was acquitted."

"I think for our purpose we shall have to assume it. I read the report of the inquest most carefully, and I see that Brinsley nowhere denied the fact that he knew of some detail, at that time hidden from the police, that might have reversed the verdict. Of course, we don't think he wrote the letter whose imprint was found on his blotter; but someone did and whoever wrote it has some strong reason for saying that she did, in fact, murder the wretched chap. It would be too risky, and quite unnecessary, for such a statement to be made if it could not be substantiated. No, I think we may say that the lady was guilty and that one man at all events knew it. From the frantic way in which she wrote for money it seems probable that whoever knew was blackmail-

ing her, and she was trying to get his price out of Brinsley. There's no doubt that he had behaved foolishly at one time, to the extent that he didn't dare let those letters be made known."

"He's engaged," Arbuthnot reminded him slowly, "to an extraordinarily striking and wealthy young woman. At such a critical time it's unlikely that any man outside a madhouse would be anxious to have the follies of his youth made public."

"Quite. To revert. Our murderer for one reason or another strangles the lady in black rage, realises an instant later what he's done and instantly seeks to convert the story. I think it's pretty obvious he knows her extremely well, and knows about the Colonel Courcy affair even if he didn't have anything to do with it. Because he at once tries to put the matter on to Denis Brinsley's shoulders. He wouldn't have thought of him if he hadn't been aware of the letters and the position between them. He immediately telephones Brinsley in the hopes that he will agree to come at once. Then he proposes to leave the door ajar, since the lady lived alone and it's vital for his purpose that Brinsley shall arrive at the flat unattended and before the advent of the police. Brinsley will be there in half-an-hour if he comes at once."

"That is to say, at six o'clock."

"I think not. At half-past five. No doctor would stickle for exact minutes. Whether the lady had been strangled at five or half-past would appear a detail. As a matter of fact, the whole case is likely to hinge on that. You remember the inspector observing casually to Grain and Voisey that the lady's

clock was half an hour fast? Of course it was. But not through any accident. When you're telephoning someone you don't as a rule make a point of mentioning the time, unless you're anxious that that person shall bring it up in the course of evidence. And most certainly you don't make a point of mentioning it more than once. But the person who rang up saying she was Mrs. Davenport made a point of mentioning it to Dick Brinsley, to Denis and to the secretary. No, A's plan is this. It is five o'clock when the murder is committed. He telephones Brinsley that it is half-past five so as to give the impression that Mrs. Davenport is alive at that hour. I make no doubt whatsoever that when you find out who the murderer is you will learn that he has a perfect alibi for five-thirty on that afternoon. Then when Brinsley refuses to go he telephones the house again saying that as a matter of fact he is coming immediately in order that Dick may be forced to give that evidence in court. Though I notice he's wriggled rather neatly out of any direct affirmative."

"He hasn't deceived anyone," said Arbuthnot coldly. "Your murderer was counting on Brinsley leaving his laboratory at once."

"Oh no. He's playing for safety. He remembers Graham. He's a trump card. The police have put it up against Denis that Graham wasn't in London and couldn't have telephoned. But anyone who knew him well—Denis, I mean, not Graham—would have heard of the fellow. Denis hates him, says he's all posturings and vain conceit and dislikes Truth who is a naked lady so much that he invariably furnishes

her with a petticoat of his own weaving. It wouldn't be hard for A to telephone a third time in Graham's name saying he's coming down, positive that that would drive Brinsley out of his office of works. We ought to be able to get hold of the telephone authorities and find out how many calls went out of the flat that afternoon. There must be some sort of record."

"And then?"

"Having limed the trap and knowing that Brinsley isn't coming after all and won't interrupt him he smashes open a drawer, finds and burns the incriminating letters, and goes out, leaving the door on the latch, either because he's afraid of rousing other tenants or because he wants it to be possible for someone to come in and find the corpse."

"And the ticket—and the blotter?"

"That's not so easy. We shall have to try and unearth something that will show us who else could have had access to the coat when Denis wasn't there. He wouldn't wear it on the Tuesday of course; it poured. Mayes might be able to help us."

"Mayes?"

"The Brinsleys' Gunga Din."

"Your thesis is that the moment he left the flat A posted off, probably by taxi, hell-for-leather to Griffiths Square and caught a bus coming back to Oxford Circus. Otherwise, how did he get the ticket?"

"That's perfectly reasonable. There's a disparity in the time, you'll remember. The doctor says Mrs. Davenport was killed about five; according to the ticket, its purchaser couldn't have reached Ox-

ford Circus till about six. A clever man, moving swiftly, could just do it."

"That's true. Another point has occurred to me, and I think a most important one. That is the question of those typewritten notes. It is incredible to me that any man who had the wit to throw the blame so successfully on another fellow should leave such glaring evidence untouched. It isn't as if they could have escaped his memory. He had gone to the trouble of breaking the lock of the drawer; from it he had taken a bundle of papers, and then he leaves behind something that incriminates him at least as much. It is beyond logic."

"Only beyond logic if we take the evidence at its face value," agreed Egerton earnestly. "Not if you follow it up to its obvious source. A burns the letters because reference has already been made to them in the blotting-paper impression. There's no reason to assume that that isn't perfectly genuine; Brinsley can't deny it because he destroyed the letter in question unread. But A leaves the typewritten slips because he knows the intelligent C.I.D. will trace them back to the machine on which they were typed."

"He knows a devil of a lot, Egerton. How does he know Brinsley owns the machine?"

"That I can't tell you. Possibly he typed the letters in Brinsley's flat. But it isn't usual to call on a man and immediately borrow his typewriter."

"It isn't. Perhaps the accomplice . . ."

"As far as I can gather from Denis there are two people and only two who have the run of the flat. And they are Dick and Mayes. Dick's beyond sus-

picion, of course. As for Mayes—I don't candidly know a great deal about him beyond the fact that he was one of the souvenirs of the War, but he always struck me as a pretty sound man. He appeared devoted to Denis in particular. That may be a pose, of course, but he's a very fine actor if it is. Because I've been in and out of that place at all times and seasons and seen Denis in every conceivable mood, and Mayes' attitude fundamentally has never changed. However, we needn't exempt Mayes, I take it? But it will be instructive to know whether anyone else could possibly have tampered with it."

"Exactly. We shall need a private detective, of course. On the whole, I think Gordon's our best man. He's pretty expensive but then defending your life is an expensive job. He must track down both Grain and Voisey; as to how he does it that's his job. He'll bring us the information as quickly as any man. He'll find out if anyone called at the flat on Tuesday morning. Somehow we've got to clear up the affair of the ticket and the facsimile letter. Your point about the two telephone calls, by the way, is excellent. There's only one thing that strikes me as even more important, and that is Brinsley's ridiculous explanation of the typewriter. Why on earth invent a purely absurd story to account for the possession of a thing you've a perfect right to have?"

"Not a perfect right in the given circumstances," suggested Egerton grimly.

"Is he the sort of chap that plays the fool in that way as a rule?"

"No. And, as I observed earlier, he's the worst liar I've ever met. It must have been patent to everyone that the yarn was an invention."

"And the reason?"

"Surely that he's peculiarly anxious that no one shall discover where he did get the machine from —or whom he got it from?"

"You think he's shielding someone? Isn't that far-fetched?"

"He suggested this morning withdrawing his defence. It mattered to him as much as that."

"It seems to me," murmured Arbuthnot shrewdly, "that Gordon's going to earn his pay. Is there any other point you'd care to make?"

"Why didn't Brinsley get rid of the machine as soon as it had served his purpose?"

"It hadn't. I don't suppose he premeditated murder, and when it was done it was too late. (Again, I give you the Crown's view.) Until then the machine might be useful for further blackmailing letters. It looks pretty bad his getting it just before the first of them was sent."

Egerton rose. "I have to get down to the House now, sir. There's one more thing that struck me and that all points to a plot. If A knew so much of Denis' movements why didn't he telephone the laboratory in the first place? He wouldn't be likely to get a busy chap like Denis at home at half-past five—or five o'clock either. Of course, the answer is that he meant all this evidence to come into court. A small point but I mention it."

An hour later, rising to make a telling point in a

strenuous debate on the new Bill before the House, no one would have guessed from his manner or his expression in repose that Denis Brinsley and his problem had any meaning for him.

CHAPTER X

THE DEFENCE

FELIX GORDON was a medium-sized thinnish man whose great virtue was that he contrived to look exactly like everybody else. You might pass him half a dozen times in twenty minutes and be sure it was a different man every time. There was nothing in the slightest degree characteristic about his walk, his voice, his appearance, his features or his manner. He demanded and received extremely high fees and would have done well with a book of memoirs if he hadn't preferred to work. He was delighted at the prospect of the Davenport murder case, which he discussed minutely with Arbuthnot. His instructions were to find out any possible clue between the dead woman and either of the men who reported the murder. His next step would depend on what he learned. On the other side, he was to try and track down the actual writer of the letters; for both he and Arbuthnot were certain that as soon as they had this information they had the murderer.

Having settled his hash for the moment the lawyer went down to see his new client first thing the following morning. He had not wasted any time and when he stepped into Brinsley's cell he was armed with all the evidence likely to be massed

against them, and a concise mental questionnaire that might help their case.

His first impression was a favourable one, but he did not make up his mind on the spur of the moment. His vast legal experience had made him realise that the simplest and most straightforward client is frequently a first-class blackguard.

"Well, this is a bad business of yours," he said curtly, as they shook hands. "You'd better tell me the whole story from your aspect of it. Begin at the beginning—about fifteen years ago I should suppose. Don't slur the smallest detail. It may be of use. When did you first meet Mrs. Davenport?"

"In 1911. I was abroad, studying in Germany and they were putting in a holiday there."

"They?"

"She and her husband. He was very decent to me and asked me up to his house occasionally. There weren't many English fellows out there at the time and most of them seemed pretty well off. I was often at a loose end, except when I was working. Mrs. Davenport was a beautiful woman and quite extraordinarily kind. She'd invite me to sit and talk to her jargon she couldn't possibly understand. I knew she didn't understand, but it didn't seem to matter much. All that mattered was that she appeared to like me to talk, and I found it a relief as well as—as . . ."

"A sop to your vanity that a beautiful woman of the world should be interested in your professional ambitions. Well?"

"I didn't see much of them really, for they only stayed two months, but Mrs. Davenport used to

write to me and ask how things were going. Again I felt she didn't really care about the scientific part of it. . . ."

"But she minded about you. Yes?"

"The following spring Colonel Courcy wrote and asked if I'd like to spend a short time with them; they had taken a villa just outside Rocqueville for the summer. Of course I went. Mrs. Davenport was lovelier and more charming to me than ever. My work hadn't brought me much in contact with women; I thought her—you can probably guess what I thought."

"You were utterly infatuated. Now—this is very important—did she appear to respond in any way, or was she merely interested in you as an ambitious youngster whom she could encourage?"

The difficult colour forced its way into the haggard face. "I don't think quite that. It's useless for me to try and tell you how she regarded my feelings, because candidly I don't know. She may have been secretly amused but refrained from wounding my susceptibilities; she may have liked them. . . ."

"How old was she?"

"Twenty-nine."

"And you?"

"Twenty-two."

"And you exchanged letters?"

"She never wrote to me, nothing but the simplest notes to invite me over to a meal and so forth. I used to pour out crazy effusions which I supposed she would burn as soon as they were read, if not before. I suppose there were nine or ten in all."

"You weren't in the house then?"

"No. I had got a job as assistant to a French scientist who had a laboratory at Rocqueville; he was doing scientific research and he taught me a great deal. In my spare time I used to drive over to see her or write to her."

"I see. Now please answer this very candidly. Suppose anyone else had read those letters what impression would they have received? I don't mean men like Egerton or your brother, but strangers, or possibly the Colonel himself or his friends?"

"I—don't—know. I daresay they sounded pretty damning."

"Would they think you were Mrs. Davenport's lover?"

"They might."

Arbuthnot's tone was very dry. "No wonder you were anxious Miss Tudor shouldn't see them."

"I was an infernal ass, of course. . . ."

"You were only an undergraduate, my friend. And they're the youngest section of the community. The public school-boy is a grandfather by comparison. I detest the breed myself. Now, did you ever make yourself conspicuous in your attentions?"

"I don't think so. I was always conscious of the tremendous gulf between us."

"Of years?"

"No, no. Of our respective positions. She was a married woman with an assured standing. I lived pretty well hand to mouth and my prospects were all in my castle in Spain."

"Still, people may have smiled?"

"I should say uncommonly probably."

"And when the Colonel was murdered?"

"There was a dinner-party that night and I was among the guests. It was a large affair and it seemed to me, among others, that the atmosphere was strained. I didn't know why, of course."

"It didn't occur to you that you might be the cause?"

"No. Why should it? In those days it would have seemed to me abominable that a man should eat another man's salt and simultaneously intrigue with his wife. My feeling for Mrs. Davenport was a romantic attachment, as the Victorian novelists put it. Most young men pass through that phase, especially when the object of devotion is an older woman, but fortunately few of them are called to account. The dinner-party lasted till nearly midnight, and then we left. I knew nothing more until the next morning when I saw in a second edition that Colonel Courcy had died mysteriously. I suspected apoplexy or a broken blood-vessel—he was one of those stout excitable men—and it came as a terrible shock when I heard that his wife had been arrested."

"You weren't called upon for evidence?"

"No. I was only a small fish swimming in those exalted waters. Of course, I was shocked like everyone else. It didn't occur to me that Mrs. Davenport could have had a hand in it, though the evidence was dead against her. The poison was put in a nightcap the old Colonel had when he went to bed. She had mixed it for him that night—a most unusual favour on her part, I gathered—and he never got out of bed again. All the evidence was

dead against her, but she got off by showing an alibi. Until then I'd believed the version of the revengeful maid, but of course they couldn't bring any evidence against her either."

"You knew the alibi was faked?"

"Yes."

"You didn't come forward?"

"It wasn't my affair."

"The man had been your host. Even if he was a brute . . ."

"I had already understood that they had agreed to go their own ways and avoid open scandal. I don't know how far they honoured the compact. But I couldn't have come forward, because I only got the information in a hole-and-corner method by chance, and I couldn't have used it any more than you'd make use of information you'd accidentally come upon in a letter addressed to someone else."

"That means you won't tell me what it was?"

"It isn't relevant."

"Perhaps you're right. But someone else knew it. That was the important thing."

"Yes—this fellow who was blackmailing her. . . ."

"One other person. Annette Lecoq."

"I was coupling the two; they seem to hunt in pairs."

"What really matters is that Mrs. Davenport knew you had that knowledge."

"Yes."

"You told her at the time?"

"No. After the trial I went away. She was acquitted, you remember, and after the funeral and

the trial and all that publicity the house was shut up and Mrs. Courcy vanished. I never heard anything more of her until I met her under her maiden name at the Rossiters'."

"Had there been any gossip linking up your names at the time of the murder?"

"I never heard of it, and I think I should have."

"That doesn't follow in the least. I remember it was suggested that she wanted to get rid of her husband because there was a lover in the offing. But she never married."

"In the circumstances she scarcely would," retorted Denis drily. "There may have been a lover —I know the idea was mooted—but if so I don't know his name."

"You used to meet other men at the house?"

"Yes, crowds of them."

"Do you recall any of the names?"

"A few; I don't know whether I'd recognise any of them again though."

"You've met none of them since?"

"None."

"Now, answer this carefully. Did you ever hear the slightest whisper connecting her name with that of any man whatsoever?"

"I don't think I should have heard it if that had been so. I was too much engaged in my work and too poor to come much in contact with the other guests. I daresay they talked. . . ."

"You don't recall a single name or a single face that you have since come across, say at the dinner Mr. Rossiter gave when Mrs. Davenport was a guest, or at any other time?"

"Not one. They were all practically strangers to me."

"Then I'm afraid you can't help us there. Now to come on to your second meeting. Did you suggest a further appointment?"

"No. She and I were the last to leave and we walked to the tube together. She said she must see me again, and there was so much urgency in her manner that I agreed."

"You met—where?"

"At her flat. We were anxious to avoid publicity. She then told me that she was being blackmailed by a man who knew that she was guilty and who was in touch with someone who could prove it."

"Did she say whether she knew who he was?"

"She said she couldn't be certain but she was almost sure it was a man whom she'd rather flouted earlier. She didn't tell me his name."

"And she appealed to you for help?"

"Yes. I explained that I couldn't give her money, not only because I hadn't got it, but as a matter of principle." He coloured again. "I'm talking like a damned prig, but one of the best fellows I ever knew shot himself because he was pestered by a blackmailer."

"What advice did you give her then?"

"I told her that blackmail was a punishable offence, and that if she took the matter to the police they'd suppress her name and run the fiend in. In any case, I'd rather she'd carried out her threat. . . ."

"Which was?"

"It's of no consequence now."

"Which was?"

"That she'd send the letters to someone who might be interested in them. . . ."

"To Miss Tudor, in fact."

"Yes. Of course, she'd have gained nothing and I daresay she would never have done it, but she was desperate."

"A peculiar situation. Considering that you had proof that she was a murderess there's a grim irony in her cracking the whip."

Denis spoke impulsively. "She knew that whatever happened I shouldn't speak."

"So she felt safe. I understand that Mrs. Davenport wrote to you the day before her death?"

"Yes. But I didn't read the letter. I destroyed it. I'd come to the end of my tether. I couldn't advance any fresh arguments and I couldn't trust myself to see her again."

Arbuthnot eyed him curiously. "Does that mean you were afraid you might do her physical injury?"

Denis hesitated. "I don't mean I should have strangled her," he said at last, turning very red, "but I might have taken the letters by force. I knew where she kept them. And I'm not an easy-tempered man."

"You haven't, I suppose, admitted that to the prosecution?"

"No."

"I'm glad to hear it. Such an admission would be enough to hang you out of hand. That sort of thing is dangerous, even to your own counsel, Sir Denis. If the impression on the blotting-paper may be trusted, and there's no reason to doubt its authen-

ticity, Mrs. Davenport said in that letter that you had one more chance and then she would show the letters to Lucille, that is, of course, to Miss Tudor. I quote verbatim."

"She never spoke of Miss Tudor by her Christian name," objected Denis scowling.

"This was probably written in a hurry."

Denis seemed to cherish a childish resentment at the familiarity. "I don't see why; she didn't know her."

"Possibly she had referred to her in that way before, and you had overlooked it."

"Considering the very peculiar circumstances it is quite unthinkable that I should have overlooked it."

Arbuthnot let that go. "You had already told her that you had spoken your last word. Now, as to the blotting-paper found in your room."

"I know nothing of that. I may not be a business man but I'm not a fool. I don't write things like that down."

The lawyer, who considered Denis the most promising fool he had ever met, said serenely, "Quite. Has anyone else the run of your library?"

"Only my servant, Mayes—and my brother, of course."

"Both of whom are beyond suspicion?"

Denis thrust his hands deep into his pockets. "I beg your pardon?" he said slowly.

"Both of whom are beyond suspicion? Please remember that in cases like this any number of formal questions have to be asked and answered."

Denis drew a deep breath. "I beg your pardon again. Yes, both of them."

"There's no one else?"

"No one."

Arbuthnot frowned. "You haven't any of Mrs. Davenport's letters, I suppose?"

"I always destroyed them as soon as I had read them."

"And you can't in any way account for the ticket or the scorched sleeve?"

"Not in any way. Of course, the sleeve may have been scorched before. I shouldn't notice."

"But your man would know."

"He might. He's a pretty useful chap."

"Thank you. His name?"

"Mayes."

"Now to come to the afternoon of the murder, that is, Monday. You say Mrs. Davenport telephoned you at half-past five?"

"Yes."

"You remember the time?"

"I remember her mentioning it."

"You didn't happen to glance at a clock?"

"I don't keep a clock in my laboratory. It irritates me. I have a secretary and she reminds me of my appointments."

"So you have only her word to go on?"

"Miss Margetson's? She's as steady as Big Ben."

"I mean Mrs. Davenport's."

"Oh, I see. Yes."

"It's a curious fact, which may prove entirely irrelevant, that Mrs. Davenport's clock was half an hour fast when the police arrived. If it had not been tampered with and she was relying upon it, it was only five o'clock really when she telephoned you."

"Does that make any difference?"

"It may be most important. We can't tell yet. It may have been a habit of Mrs. Davenport's to keep her clocks advanced. . . ."

He shook his head emphatically. "No. It was a foible with her that clocks should be right to the minute. I think I know the clock you mean—a rosewood affair, standing on four round balls of wood, with a plain, very clear face. It stands in the centre of the living-room mantelpiece, and she once told me it was as certain as Greenwich."

"I haven't seen the clock, but I'll make a note of that and have it verified. It may be a most important piece of evidence. Now, when you had refused to go and see Mrs. Davenport, what happened next?"

"Graham rang me up an instant later and said in his infernally breezy way that he'd come down and see me. I said I couldn't see him, I shouldn't be in, and because I knew he'd come anyway I went straight out. I wanted to think in any case, and I wandered through various London streets round the Temple. No, I didn't speak to a policeman or a fireman or a clerk or a stray dog or anything. I remember presently looking at my watch and realising that I had a dinner appointment; then I got into the tube and came back, arriving about seven."

"It seems that we, like other hard-pressed gentlemen, must perforce make bricks without straw. You hadn't, of course, the slightest suspicion that it wasn't Graham telephoning you?"

"Not the slightest."

"Did the voice appear similar?"

"It's difficult to tell voices on a telephone. Sometimes they have a completely Cockney accent."

Arbuthnot agreed that this was so. "It seems clear from the evidence that whoever did do the murder is someone with an intimate knowledge of your movements and acquaintances."

"Yes. I'd noticed that myself. But I don't know that it leads you far. For if the pseudo-Graham could ring up and put it over me the other day there's no reason why he shouldn't equally telephone my secretary and get relevant information out of her on other days. Also, though I personally know extremely few people, even they chat and the most trivial details get abroad. I daresay there are a score of men who know my feeling about Graham, and who would realise that to get me out of my laboratory they only had to mention his name."

"Exactly." He fixed the accused man with his piercing gaze. "One last point. The typewriter."

Denis did not stir, but the lawyer saw his eyes narrow. "Yes?" he asked politely. "I'm afraid I can't tell you more than I told the coroner's court."

"I don't want more," said Arbuthnot bluntly, "I want facts."

"I beg your pardon."

"Come, Sir Denis, I'm your defence. You can't afford to haggle now. Where did that typewriter really come from?"

"A man named Weyman . . ."

The lawyer rose. "You mean to stick to that?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"It's the answer to your question."

"You mean, it's the only answer you have for me. Sir Denis," he was stung to a fury of anger at the combined impertinence and idiocy of this enigmatic pale determined man confronting him, "I think you scarcely realise the position. You are asking me to defend you on a capital charge. The evidence against you is overwhelming. We shall need every ounce of intelligence and finesse and above all information to win through. And you are deliberately withholding evidence that may be of the greatest value."

Denis' expressionless face did not alter. "I'm sorry," he said. "I haven't anything more to say."

"I should be justified," said Arbuthnot, speaking very quietly, "in abandoning the case, in the circumstances."

Denis, very pale and stiff, asked, "Is that your intention?"

"No," snapped Arbuthnot, "it isn't. Because, in spite of your lunacy on this point, I don't think you did murder the woman, and I should like to be the man to prove that."

Denis bowed.

"You needn't think," the other went on, "that we shan't ferret out your secret. It's simply a question of wasting a little time. But we shall get it."

He saw that what he said had struck home. The dark eyes burned as if with fever in the ravaged face.

"I'm a fool to go on with this case," reflected Arbuthnot as he went away, "and yet—I always had a sneaking liking for Don Quixote. He always

seemed to me more of a gentleman than his adversaries. This fellow's obviously shielding someone and he'd rather be hanged than have the name brought into court. Now who?" And he began to enumerate in his mind the names of those for whom Denis Brinsley might be prepared to risk his life.

CHAPTER XI

INTERVIEWING AN ARTIST

1

GORDON was a great believer in the law of elimination. Get rid first of all of those people and circumstances that can be shown to have no dealings, direct or otherwise, with the principals or circumstances of a crime, and your field is instantly narrowed to a conveniently small compass. But to harbour suspicion against half a dozen people without actually crystallising that suspicion into certainty in a single case is to find yourself in the position of the author who promised a book by a certain date but couldn't make up his mind which plot he would use, with the result that when the appointed day dawned he found himself with several excellent openings and no final chapter.

Gordon decided therefore that his first step was to discover which, if either, of the two men who had reported the murder to the police had any appreciable motive. Before seeing either of them, however, he journeyed to Notting Hill Gate to find out if anyone had called at the flat on the Tuesday, before the arrival of the detective, and had had an opportunity of tampering with the coat and the blotting-pad.

The events of the past week had created in Mayes so vast an amount of suspicion that he didn't offer to let Gordon in; even his statement that he was on the prisoner's side was received with scepticism.

"Well, I suppose we can talk in the hall," suggested Gordon pleasantly. "Is anyone else in?"

"No one."

"Sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Because it's particularly important that no one should overhear our conversation. Even walls have ears." Mayes' expression of controlled indignation indicated that no walls had any such things when he was in command. "Can you tell me when Sir Denis last wore his blue overcoat?"

"He wore it all Monday; but not on Tuesday."

"Ah! It was wet, wasn't it?"

"That's right. He wore a Burberry instead."

"And where was the coat all Tuesday?"

"Hanging up in the hall here."

"On that stand?"

"Yes, sir."

"The whole day?"

"The whole day."

"You didn't, for instance, take it away for a few minutes to brush it or dry it?"

"Wish to God I had. I'd have seen that blasted ticket and taken it out."

Gordon shook his head. "Oh no," he contradicted softly, "I don't think so."

"I would," asseverated Mayes angrily.

"How could you if it wasn't there?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, someone put it there, didn't they? And Sir Denis says it wasn't his doing. Then it stands to reason that somebody tampered with it between the time it was hung on that stand and the time when it was examined by the police—that is, between Monday night and five or six on Tuesday."

"But who, sir?"

"That's what I want to know. Did anyone come to the door trying to sell brooms or soap?"

"No one."

"Or writing-paper? Or onions? Or collecting for the Salvation Army?"

"No, sir. And wouldn't have got nothing if they had. I'm a Plymouth Brother myself, and the gentlemen are scientists. . . ."

Gordon smiled faintly. "Both of them?"

"Yes, sir, that way."

"I see. Did any shop send a parcel?"

"No, sir."

"Or perhaps a postman called, or someone disguised as a postman?"

"There were some letters, sir, but they came through the box in the ordinary way."

"No policeman came?"

"A policeman?" Mayes sounded scandalised.

"Yes. You know them—fellows in blue with cooking sleeves and helmets."

"We have no police here."

"You've had them since."

"Only that Jamieson."

"I see. For your information I may point out that you can't be too careful where the police are concerned. It's better to insult a Prime Minister than

a policeman. He might put it down to what you'd had for lunch, but the bobby wouldn't. Then you're positive that from the instant Sir Denis went out in the morning there was no one inside this flat but yourself?"

"And Mr. Richard, of course."

"Mr. Richard? Oh, Sir Denis' brother. That all?"

"Miss Tudor called for an instant, but you wouldn't mean anyone like her."

"I mean anyone at all, if it's only a black cat. It might have grown up in a circus and learned tricks. What time did she come?"

"About eleven."

"Why did she come?"

"To bring back a book."

"Did she come inside?"

"Yes. She wrote a note for Sir Denis."

"Wrote a note? Where?"

"In the library."

"Was she there very long? You'll realise that we have to sift the most unlikely evidence to the dregs."

"Yes, sir. She was perhaps ten minutes. She left him a note."

"You didn't see that of course?"

"No, sir. It would be private."

"Of course," repeated Gordon. "Now—I shall have to include all this in my statement. Let me make sure I've got it complete. Miss Tudor came here on Tuesday at about eleven; she brought a book with her and went straight into the library . . ."

"She waited where you're standing for a moment while I went to see if Sir Denis had put out

another book for her to take. When I found he hadn't, she said she'd come and find it for herself, and when she'd found it she said she'd write a note to say she'd taken it."

"Did she take long to find it?"

"No. She knew just where it was."

"I see. So she took nearly ten minutes to write the note. It must have been pretty long."

"She tore up one, anyhow; I found the pieces in the basket."

"And burned them, of course?"

"Sir Denis can't bear to see his basket used by anyone else. It's a kind of fancy he has. So I put the pieces in the stove."

"Ah well, we are but human. And after that Miss Tudor went?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did anyone else come possibly during the afternoon?"

"No, sir."

"No one from one of the other flats? No one to see you for a moment perhaps?"

"Not a soul."

"Did you leave the flat for an instant, say to go to the post or get something from a shop?"

"No, sir. It was a miserable day and I telephoned."

"You mean for food and so forth?"

"Yes."

"Then surely someone must have come to the door."

"All tradesmen send their goods up by a lift that

runs up the back of the house. Only the tenants and their visitors use these stairs."

Gordon sighed. "Foiled again! Well, Mayes, we don't seem to be getting much forrader, do we? Thank you for your information, though. It'll help me to make a full report."

2

Leaving Notting Hill Gate, Gordon telephoned Grain's house, and on learning from the butler that he was out made an appointment for three-quarters of an hour later and decided to call a little early and see if the man could be persuaded to disgorge any useful information. In the interim he thought it was worth his while going to the laboratory to see if he could unearth any scrap of evidence that Jamieson's scrupulousness had miraculously overlooked. He found Miss Margetson sitting at a large square table, her chin cupped in her hands, her elbows among the papers, surrounded by letters that she had opened and then forgotten. Her pleasant face was lined and pale, so that the freckles stood out with startling distinctness. She glanced at Gordon with a mixture of apathy and suspicion.

The private detective explained. "I am engaged by Sir Denis' counsel to take up the case for the defence," he said.

Her eyes brightened; her listlessness fell away from her. "Thank God, they're doing something at last. You will find the real murderer, won't you?"

"I hope so. That's my job. I think it may help if

I ask you to go once more very minutely over the evidence you have already given in case there is a scrap somewhere that has been underrated."

"Of course I will," she agreed eagerly. "I'd do anything . . . Oh, they must be mad to think he had anything to do with so vile an affair. He wasn't like that. It's absurd."

"You have to remember that the judge and jury take a quite impartial view, relying only on the facts put before them by both sides. Now to go back to the vexed question of the telephone calls. You say the first came at half-past five. You put that through to Sir Denis?"

"Yes. And I have only the caller's word for it that it was half-past five."

"I understand that. Of course, you didn't hear any of the conversation?"

"As a matter of fact, as I've already told the police, I had to go down to the basement for a moment and I took the opportunity while Sir Denis was engaged and wouldn't want me. I wish now I hadn't."

"And immediately afterwards this Mr. Graham rang up, or someone giving his name?"

"As I say, I wasn't there. I know he rang up because Sir Denis says he did, but that isn't evidence."

"No. Now try to recall whether there had been any other telephone messages during the afternoon."

"Several. There usually are. But I don't put them through unless they're important."

"Were there any from strangers that afternoon?"

"I don't think so."

"There wasn't, for instance, a call almost immediately before Mrs. Davenport's?"

"No. At least—she had some difficulty in getting through. The first time she was cut off. . . ."

"You're perfectly sure?"

"Yes. She asked 'Is Sir Denis Brinsley there?' I asked who was speaking and she said 'It's all right. Is he at his office?' I said he was but he was very busy, and she said 'I shall not delay him' and then we were cut off."

"Was it a man's voice or a woman's?"

"A woman's."

"You're positive?"

"Oh, absolutely."

"Was it the same as Mrs. Davenport's when she came through a little later?"

"I'm practically certain it was. And anyway she said so."

"What did she actually say? Can you remember her own words?"

"She said 'I think we were cut off.' "

Gordon leaned forward; he seemed tremendously impressed by the evidence. "Now then think—this is extraordinarily important. How long would you say elapsed between your being cut off and Mrs. Davenport's next call?"

Miss Margetson considered. "About five minutes."

"You're sure? You may have to swear to this in court."

"Yes, quite sure. If anything it was longer."

"Excellent. Long enough, that is, for another call

to be put through to him in the interval at his own house?"

She gazed at him in helpless bewilderment. "Does that help?"

"Tremendously. I can't—naturally—say anything more lucid at the moment. But you must remember that a case like this is rather like a patchwork quilt; you don't suddenly stumble on the truth with a fanfare of trumpets; you slowly piece it together. What you've just told me confirms a theory I'm working on. Whether I can prove it or not depends on other scraps of evidence I haven't collected yet."

"But you will soon?" There was a desperate anxiety in her voice.

"Hardly soon, I'm afraid. These are generally long jobs. But we shall find him. Don't doubt that."

"I won't," she said simply, and turned back to her desk.

"Well," reflected Gordon crossing the road and boarding a passing omnibus, "he's got one staunch friend at any rate. And he'll need all he can find."

He was a quarter of an hour early for his appointment with the artist. Having admitted him, Pope, Wyndham Grain's man, seemed a little ill at ease as if his employer's uncertain temper might be vented on himself. He looked furtively at the newcomer who had sent in a card inscribed (in ink):

Cyrus F. Davis,
Representative Quarterly Art Journal of
New York,
9009 West 520th Street,
New York, N. Y.

He looked back from the card to its bearer, who was to-day clad in aggressively English clothes, smoked a pipe and wore a cloth cap, that he had bought from a neighbouring hatter.

"Are you the gentleman who telephoned, sir?"

"Yes. If Mr. Grain isn't in I can wait."

"I explained, sir, that he might be too busy to see you when he does come in. He is extremely occupied just now."

"Really? Well, if he sees me he'll be more occupied than ever. I'm here to make his fortune."

The man allowed himself to show faint signs of cynicism. "Really, sir?"

"Yes. Ever heard of the Q. A. J.?"

Pope shook his head. "Never, sir."

"Well, this here's the copy of the first number; this is only the manuscript, mind you. One day those manuscripts are going to be worth a powerful lot of money. At present I'm carrying them about waiting to have 'em proofed. There's articles there from the leading art connoisseurs in Europe and the United States. Let a man's name be boomed in this," he slapped the parcel of MS. that he had sat up late the previous night preparing in a score of handwritings, "and he's made. Everyone in the States'll be falling over themselves to meet him and be painted by him."

"Mr. Grain's time is fully occupied with his English commissions sir," Pope pointed out icily.

Gordon, in his role of Davis, waxed confidential. "You believe me, boy, it's dollars all the day with these painting mutts the same as with hod-carriers like you'n me. What do your English swell dames

give him per foot of canvas? Well, I tell you our Noo Yorkers'll give double. And you think that won't fetch him over to Noo York? Stop me on the street and ask me!"

He had been shown during this harangue into a large and beautifully upholstered room, whose walls were panelled in polished grey satinwood, very carefully chosen, so that the exquisite grain was seen through the lustrous surface. Four full-length mirrors made additional panels, one to each wall. There were several windows veiled in heavy silk curtains. The furniture was of satinwood and the chairs upholstered in grey. Evidently, for all his uncouth exterior, Grain understood the art of making himself comfortable and surrounding himself by a gracious atmosphere.

Gordon took in the room swiftly, and asked, "Is this where he writes his letters and those wonderful memoirs that come out in the Sunday papers?"

"Yes, sir."

"I guess it's fine to be rich and famous," exclaimed the other a shade enviously. "Yes, sir. Now, tell me . . ." But his plans were frustrated by the premature arrival of the irascible genius. There was a great commotion in the outer hall and a door slammed. The butler darted across the room to meet his employer on the threshold.

"What the devil . . . ?" glared Wyndham Grain and brushing the man aside he strode over to the window where Gordon stood. The latter turned totally unabashed.

"This is a great honour, Mr. Grain. I represent the Q. A. J. You know the initials, of course."

"Represent 'em in hell," growled Grain, "not here."

"The object of the Q. A. J. . . ."

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't want to. Pope . . ."

Gordon, however, was uncrushable. "I should have explained perhaps that the Q. A. J. stands for the Quarterly Art Journal of New York. We've very keen to do a special series dealing with the work of the more distinguished English artists, in particular with English portrait-painters. I have been instructed to approach you in the first place as the finest portrait-painter of the day . . ."

"Damn' liar!" muttered Grain contemptuously. "What the devil's the good of trying to stuff me up with all that muck? Collett can eat any other portrait-painter here or in your accursed country and we all know it. Not a man to touch him for flesh-tints. That portrait of Berthe Dupont, for instance. . . . P'raps your people have never heard of that?"

"Jumping Moses! I recall that of course. Exhibited in France and sold to a man on our side for sixteen thousand dollars."

"Oh, you have heard of him?"

"I sure have. But, Mr. Grain, if it isn't taxing you too far, perhaps you'd be kind enough, as I am here, to give me a few biographical details. We want to know—the public does, that is—what sort of man their pet artist is . . ."

"You run away and read Alice through the Looking-Glass."

"Why's that?"

"Then you'll learn from a philosopher called Humpty Dumpty that men are woefully alike, all have their eyes and noses in the same place . . ."

"Say, I didn't mean that. They can see that from a photograph. What I'm trying to get is personal details; we know about your work. But do you write with a red quill pen or a Parker Duofold, or only use a typewriter . . . ?"

"A typewriter! Good God, the man who invented those should be eternally boiled in oil. And quill pens indeed! No, I use a penny wooden holder with a crossed nib. You can see me do it." He hurled himself into a chair and scrawled on a blank sheet "This fellow from the Q. A. J. is a bloody fool."

Gordon grasped it instantly. "I'll take that and many thanks. We might reproduce a facsimile in the middle of the article. Just one more moment, sir. You've travelled a lot?"

"Of course. D'you suppose you learn art at the Battersea Polytechnic?"

"I daresay not. But I did hear of one young woman called Brontë who wrote a work of genius just living in a northern parsonage."

"Because she had genius, you blockhead. It's a pity we can't mew up some of these modern young women scribblers in parsonages too instead of letting 'em loose to pester our clubs and dance-halls and gaming-hells. Out for experience, they say. Confounded little sluts! Is your unspeakable public interested in my views on women?"

"Interested in anything you say, Mr. Grain. About this travelling. You know Italy, of course?"

"Italy is an abode of stinks overrun by tourists of

all nations who add to the odours. Give me Germany every time. People do a little work there."

"If you'd tell me when you were there last—your impressions—I've got almost enough for a fine column. Are you a vegetarian? Folks always like to know that. Or do you keep mongeese?"

"No, to both the last. What d'you suppose a society painter could do with mongeese? Pity your people can't send a man with a little common-sense."

"When you come over to our side, Mr. Grain . . ."

"I'm not coming a second time."

"So you have been?" He sounded chagrined as if he expected to have been warned.

"Spent eight months there painting the wives of pork-butchers. My God, those women's bosoms! Like shelves some of 'em. That was in the days when women had such things. They're obsolete over here, like the dodo."

"This was before the war, then?"

"Nineteen hundred and twelve. I was there from February till the beginning of December and God help me, I'll never come across again."

"Never's a long word, Mr. Grain. (Say, is that all right or do you like the whole hank?)"

"Oh God, no. Make it shorter if you can. How much time d'you suppose I've got to spare hearing a penny-a-liner talk like Aunt Mabel in the Chicks' Column?"

Gordon smiled in a deprecating manner. "I won't detain you any longer, sir, but won't you just say something about this new portrait you're doing?"

"No, I won't. What portrait is that?"

"The portrait of Miss Lucille Tudor, the heiress. I hear . . ."

"The devil knows what you may hear skulking in your confounded cellars. I wouldn't paint that girl for all her money. She's just the type I detest. Afraid of life, so puts on a high-falutin air and pretends to despise it. No, don't contradict me. Do you think a painter doesn't *know?* Of course he does."

"You're acquainted with Miss Tudor?" queried the pseudo-Davis.

"I am not, unless you call glaring at her across a devilish good dinner-table being acquainted. And I don't wish to be. There's one thing, she'll have to wake up now her fancy-man's in gaol."

"Oh yes. Queer case that. Causing a lot of excitement, it seems."

"Any garbage seems good to a gutter cat," returned Grain contemptuously. "Why can't they use their artistic senses a bit? This was bound to happen to that type of woman. And I told Voisey so. The damned cheek of these young whelps. Why should he be the only man privileged to call on the lady at unconventional hours? He couldn't satisfy a woman like that. Men aren't what they were twenty years ago. Yes, Pope? Of course I'd forgotten. What do I keep you for but to remind me of appointments? Don't trip on the stairs, Mr. Q. A. J. And if you send me a proof I shall put it on the fire."

"Queer thing how a man who likes to hustle the way he does can't stand a typewriter around," suggested the detective to the slightly sullen Pope who showed him the door.

"Never could," said Pope gloomily. "He's had

secretaries, but they don't stay. He miscalls their handwriting and won't have a machine. Thank you, sir, I'm sure."

"Say, I'm grateful to *you,* sir. I wouldn't have missed this interview for my fare home."

Well, Pope reflected, gauging from Grain's furious voice shouting from the bathroom, that he was in for a *mauvais quart d'heure,* these Americans might be vandals as people said, but they knew how to tip you. Not many Englishmen would have given him half as much for five minutes' work. And it would be useful, too, for Grain paid his servant atrociously low wages. Pope only stayed because it was the first place he'd ever had where his employer didn't object to his getting drunk every ten days or so. But then he did it himself, saying it was a natural craving of humanity and that it was dangerous to repress all the instincts.

CHAPTER XII

THE ALIBI

GORDON, walking fast in a westerly direction, pieced together the information he had just obtained. He thought that on the whole it let Grain out of the case and quite definitely let Voisey in. That last unguarded reference to the young man was a rare bit of luck. As for the artist, he had no typewriter, he had been in America during the fatal year (it should be quite easy to confirm that, and this Gordon resolved to do), he didn't know Lucille Tudor. Obviously the machine that was so important a part of this affair had not come either directly or indirectly from him. The more he considered the case the more certain he became that Lucille played an important part in the laying of the trail. Turning over the evidence in his mind he could find no explanation of the omnibus ticket and the blotting-pad but the fact of her visit. It followed, therefore, that the actual murderer, whose accomplice she must surely be, was someone on extremely intimate terms with her. That someone was certainly not Wyndham Grain. But Gordon, like everyone else to whom these things might ultimately assume importance, was aware of the gossip current about her and young Voisey. The next step, then,

was to see whether she could be connected with the typewriter also. What else could lie behind Denis Brinsley's clumsy and ineffective lying but the fact that she was in some way implicated? He considered for some time a way of assuring himself of this, and decided that he could do nothing without being effectually disguised. That, then, must wait till the morning. In any case it would be better to wait until to-morrow, for the visit he proposed to pay must be paid when Lucille Tudor was well away and she might easily be at home now. He switched off his attention to the young author. He must in some manner discover what he was doing prior to eight o'clock on that ominous Monday night. It was a peculiar thing to do, that taking of a stranger up to a woman's flat, when they had been barely introduced, and Grain's casual words had confirmed his belief that there was some intimate and secret relation between Mrs. Davenport and the young man. He could, of course, resume the role he had played for the artist's benefit, that of an American journalist anxious for copy about the young writer. But he wasn't sure how that would help him. If he were implicated in the murder he would be well on his guard. Gordon decided after some thought to go to his club, having first telephoned and assured himself that his quarry was not there.

The club porter was in a genial mood and inclined to be helpful to the nondescript man who presented himself a quarter of an hour later, and who spoke English slowly and with a stammering French accent.

"M. Guilbert Voisey?" he asked.

"He's not at the club at present, sir. Will you wait?"

"He is coming? Yes? At any minute he is coming?"

"I couldn't say, sir. He hasn't telephoned."

"But he is expecting me."

"In that case, sir, no doubt he'll come."

Gordon shook a dubious head. "I do not know. He is strange, that young man. He was to be here for me on Monday at five o'clock and he did not come."

"Monday?" The porter frowned. "Blest if I remember him on Monday. No, come to think of it, 'e wasn't 'ere. You by any chance the gentleman what rang him up that day?"

"I did ring him up. But perhaps other gentlemen rang him up also. He was not here at all?"

"No, nor at his house neither, because the gentleman said he'd telephoned."

"That is right. That was I. No, I could find of him no trace. I think he has forgotten or he is dead. I will go over to the post office and I will come back soon and see if he is here."

The post office practically faced the club; it was a corner building and had two entrances, so it was easy enough for Gordon to go in by one, pause long enough to buy some stamps and go out by the other, unnoticed by the porter who was already burning with impatience to know what won the two-thirty. Despite his information regarding Voisey's movements, Gordon had no intention of taking a casual statement for granted. His next visit must be to

Voisey's rooms. Here again he hoped to find them occupied only by the servant. A few moments' privacy would tell him all he needed to know, and a little greasing of the palm as a rule had wonderful results. From a street box he telephoned, only to be answered by Voisey himself. He said "Wrong number. Sorry" and rang off. Then he stationed himself at a convenient corner and waited, covertly watching Voisey's entrance. For half an hour he stood there and then just as it was beginning to rain an empty taxi with the flag down rolled past him and stopped at Voisey's door. The young man himself came out, dressed for calling. It was now about ten minutes before four. Gordon let the taxi vanish and then ran up the stairs to the young novelist's rooms.

Dobbie, a suave typical manservant, opened the door. "Mr. Voisey is out, sir."

"I think he is expecting me."

"No, sir. He isn't expecting anyone."

"But I write—I tell him I am coming."

"He didn't say anything to me, sir."

"Then he has forgotten again. I will explain. I was to see him last Monday at his Club. I go to the club and he is not there. I think—I have made a mistake, he must mean his house, but by that time I have waited and it is too late for me to come. That is right, I think? He was here on Monday, expecting me?"

"No, sir. He was out on Monday." The portly body blocked the entrance still. He didn't trust these foreigners the length of their foxy noses.

"No, sir," he repeated, as the stranger stood there in speechless and evident distress. "He wasn't expecting anyone on Monday."

"And he was not even in?"

"No, sir."

"So if I had telephoned he would not be here?"

"No, sir. He came in for a few minutes just before half-past five. . . ."

"Quelle dommage! If I had come along then I would have found him."

"No, sir. He didn't stay. He'd been to a theatre. . . ."

"A bad theatre, I think."

"Why, sir?"

"Or he would not be back so early."

"He said it was very short, didn't begin till two-forty and over in two hours. Rather annoyed, sir, to tell you the truth. He called it cheating the audience."

"Eh bien!" sighed the visitor. "I think nearly always it is too long. I am rejoiced to know there is a short play in London. You cannot tell me which it was?"

"I couldn't be sure, sir. But the play was about a lady that borrowed her husband's dressing-gown and they brought her into the Divorce Courts. Silly sort o' play it sounded to me."

"Most plays are silly. I think I shall not go myself. And then he went out again? Perhaps that time he went to his club and I would have found him there if I had waited."

"I couldn't say, sir. He said he wouldn't be back till late."

"And that was the night they found the body of this so unfortunate lady? Ah, a horrible business, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"'Orrible, sir. She was a beautiful lady, too. Shook up Mr. Voisey something dreadful."

"*Eh bien!* To find one's friend . . ."

Dobbie was suddenly on the alert. "Dunno about friend, sir. He'd met the lady . . ."

The pseudo-Frenchman's gaze met his; in the hazel eyes there was an expression of complete understanding. "I am a man of the world," he said. "Why should he not have the lady for his friend?"

But Dobbie remained rigid. "Couldn't say anything about that, sir. None of my affair."

"But then you never saw her?"

"Just that once I did, of course."

"When she came here? Yes?"

"Yes. What name shall I say to Mr. Voisey?"

"May I perhaps leave a note for him? I return to France to-morrow."

"Blooming good thing, too," reflected Dobbie. "Altogether too nosey, these foreigners. Come in here, sir. I'll find you some paper."

He stayed resolutely in the room while Gordon wrote a note about mythical business that had brought him to town. Meanwhile, under cover of penmanship, his eyes were rapidly glancing round the room in search of something to substantiate his suspicions. At his elbow was an engagement diary and this he manœuvred to open with his elbow while Dobbie's attention was momentarily disturbed.

"Is Mr. Voisey writing anozzer book?" he asked cheerfully.

"I believe so, sir."

"He will be a great man."

"Yes, sir."

"He must also be a rich man. Does he keep many secretaries?"

"No, sir. He says he can't do with 'em."

"He typewrites his books himself?" demanded Gordon with immense incredulity.

Dobbie returned with increased hauteur, "He sends all his work out to be typed."

"He does not have a typewriter at all?"

"Certainly not." Dobbie had once been a junior clerk and had failed to conquer the intricacies of the typewriter. He, therefore, reserved for these machines a depth of contempt that he lavished on nothing else.

"I thought," explained Gordon with careful simplicity, "that all writers had machines of their own."

"Not," said Dobbie coldly, "when they're as famous as Mr. Voisey. *They* don't need to type their own books."

Gordon signed his letter with a flourish—Raoul Mornier—and in setting down the pen knocked the engagement block on to the floor. Dobbie moved in a stately way but the visitor had picked it up with many apologies and restored it to the table, but not before he had seen the initials "H. D." scrawled against most days of the previous month and occasionally during the preceding one. No such entry appeared for the past week.

Leaving the note with Dobbie, Gordon bought an evening paper and turned into a tea-shop to scan the list of theatres and see which of them could conceivably be the one Voisey had visited on the important Monday afternoon. Voisey, he reflected, was the type of gilded young-man-about-town who made a point of seeing all the new plays as they were produced; no doubt he frequently attended first nights. It was easy to dispose of eighty per cent. of the plays on the ground either of longevity or an absence of a Monday matinee. Of the six remaining two were admittedly long, two were completing long runs and two were possible. Both were recent productions, both were what is called "modern," both had been praised by the freaks and reviled by the critics; either might amuse a young man who finds himself with a free afternoon—always supposing he had actually been at the theatre that day.

Summoning his waitress, Gordon paid his bill and took the tube to Theatreland. The two houses were conveniently close together. He went first to the Eros, and scanned the photographs in the frames outside the booking office. He regretfully came to the conclusion that they might have stood for any one of half-a-dozen equally pointless and futile pieces, and he went to the small window and asked for a seat.

"Only boxes left," said the clerk mechanically.

"You're doing well?"

"Yes, sir. Nothing cheaper till next week."

"I must come again then. Isn't this the play about the lady who wears her husband's dressing-gown?"

The clerk, deep in a book, lifted his head an instant to say, "No, sir. That's the Princess of York," and dropped back again.

The Princess of York was only a few minutes distant. Gordon had to wait while a lady in Canadian mink roundly abused the management because she had had six seats and one of them was behind a pillar. When at last she was gone the harassed but unsympathetic clerk looked up rather irritably.

"Any stalls for to-night?"

He went through the pretence of examining his plan of the theatre, though he knew that not more than a dozen stalls had been booked.

"Going well?" asked Gordon casually.

"Pretty good for the time of the year," said the attendant. "Twelve shillings, please. Row E. No. 12."

Gordon laid down a pound. "Pretty short, I understand?"

"People are clamouring for short plays."

"Matinee's over by a quarter to five, isn't it?"

"Something like that."

"How do you find the audience appreciates that?"

"Good hour for tea."

"You don't think they feel cheated? Two hours, less half an hour for intervals, isn't much of a run for the money."

"Of course, some people complain," admitted the man coldly. "They ought to go to a Harliquinade."

"I hear it's jolly good," went on Gordon men-

daciously, gathering up his change. "A friend of mine came here last Monday. He'd offered me a ticket, too, but though I turned up early there was no sign of him. You'd have thought he might have waited, wouldn't you? He swears he did, but you'd surely have seen him hanging about, wouldn't you? Or he'd have spoken to the commissionaire and given him the ticket in case I was late."

"Or left it here."

"He didn't, of course?"

"No, sir."

"I know he came because he told me how much he enjoyed it, though he thought it was on the short side. I wonder if you'd recognise him?" He drew a photograph of Voisey out of his pocket. The man inspected it, then shook his head.

"Don't remember him, sir. Of course in a crowd . . ." But there hadn't been a crowd on Monday afternoon and both men knew it.

"Candidly I think he offered that ticket to someone else, and forgot he'd offered it to me first. I wonder if you'd mind looking back to Monday's matinee and seeing how many tickets he did buy. The name is Voisey. . . ."

"No mention of that name here," said the clerk after a moment. Gordon laughed shortly and went away, considerably distressed. For if the play was such a frost nothing would be easier than for the man to drop in and get a ticket on the spur of the moment. If it should prove impossible to show that Voisey had not, in fact, been at the theatre on that afternoon the case against him fell to the ground. For he couldn't have murdered Mrs. Davenport in

Pontifex Street, been back at his rooms in South Kensington at five-twenty and attended the theatre. On the other hand, he might have murdered the woman, put through the false telephone messages, burned the letters and taxi'd straight back to South Kensington where Denis had his laboratory. He could put in an appearance for an instant to disarm suspicion, and then take the omnibus direct to Oxford Circus for the purpose of obtaining the bus-ticket. Everything seemed to depend here again on the question of time. He had specifically called his servant's attention to the fact that it was twenty past five when he returned. And he could not have got from Oxford Street to South Kensington at such an hour unless he had come by taxi since his rooms were six or seven minutes' walk from the station. Another thought struck him. Dobbie had mentioned that he hadn't taken a taxi, but had walked from the tube. But who could say whether he hadn't dismissed his taxi at the corner in order that the evidence against him might be null and void? It appeared to Gordon that if the writer were really connected with the crime he was covering his tracks with remarkable skill.

He wondered whether it would be possible to discover where he had gone as soon as he left South Kensington, but that being manifestly beyond all guessing Gordon sensibly left the problem alone and turned his thoughts to Lucille Tudor. He was convinced that she was privy to the plot. Rossiter's house was in Hyde Park and the detective walked there from South Kensington, pondering as

he went. He did not propose to do anything in connection with her this afternoon, but he thought he might as well get a glance at the lie of the land.

The house, he discovered, was a large one facing the Green Park. Only wealthy people could have maintained such an establishment. As Gordon looked at it the front-door opened and Gilbert Voisey came down the steps. Gordon lounged by the railings on the other side of the road. Voisey looked a little distrait, as if something he didn't at all like had happened behind those doors. Gordon wondered a little whether it would be worth trailing the man to see where he went, though he didn't expect to learn anything. He saw Voisey hail a taxi and heard him say in an irritable voice, "54 Holdenbrooke Court. Yes, it's in South Kensington" and himself picked up another to whom he gave the address of a house close by. As he shut the door of his cab he glanced through the window and saw another young man mount the Rossiter steps, and recognised young Richard Brinsley, brother of the accused man. Possibly he was going to plead his brother's cause; Gordon didn't think his speech would have much effect. There had been no public announcement as yet of the broken engagement, but it was pretty generally taken for granted that Brinsley's name would cease to be mentioned, even if he were acquitted, and that Lucille would marry Gilbert Voisey as soon as the minimum period of formal mourning was over. Innocent or guilty, the dice seemed weighted against the scientist.

In point of fact, Gordon had a dull evening, for Voisey went straight up to his rooms and though the detective watched for a long time he didn't emerge again, and shortly after midnight all lights were put out.

CHAPTER XIII

DENIS BRINSLEY'S SECRET

1

DICK BRINSLEY waited in the drawing-room at Hyde Park Corner, feeling a little embarrassed, extremely angry and at heart apprehensive. He had managed to get a "permit" to see his brother the following day and had bluntly asked whether any such request had come from Lucille. None had, and he was fully determined to see the girl before paying his visit. Denis would be certain to ask for news of Lucille, with eyes if not with lips, and Dick was determined to have some definite thing to say to him. A neutral attitude in a case like this was impossible. Either Lucille must come out whole-heartedly for her accepted lover, or she must throw him over, not in secret but openly. Dick hated by-paths and all things furtive and unacknowledged. So did Denis. The scientist in him liked to have things clean-cut, even if they were things that wrought havoc and destruction. In his own mind he was almost sure what she would say; had she been with Denis in this shocking affair she would surely have made some attempt to communicate with him; but she had done nothing. Nevertheless, decided Dick, she shouldn't get off as

easily as that. He walked impatiently up and down the handsome room. Why on earth didn't she come? The door opened and Dick swung round. But it was only Rossiter.

"Good afternoon, Brinsley. Lucille's sent me as her ambassador. She's got a very bad headache and asked me to make her apologies and find out what you wanted."

"I want Lucille," said Dick stubbornly.

Rossiter looked troubled. "My dear fellow, I'm sorry. You must realise yourself how impossible the position has become."

"All this hiding from one another is making it more impossible," argued the young man. "I shan't keep Lucille for more than five minutes."

"She asks me to say she isn't well. This has had rather a shocking effect on her, you know."

"You must remember that most of my sympathy is reserved for Denis. It's had an even worse effect on him. Would you please let Lucille know that I'm still here?"

"We're getting a little melodramatic. And it's a waste of time. Lucille knows her own mind."

"That's what I want her to tell me. She can't be so ghastly ill that she can't spare me five minutes. She gave half-an-hour to Voisey."

"To Voisey?" Rossiter's tone suggested that his visitor had overstepped the bounds of good taste.

"Yes," repeated Dick, who didn't care a tinker's curse what Rossiter thought, and who was perfectly prepared to insult the whole family, if necessary, "I turned up about the same time as he did, and

I thought I'd wait. I didn't want a three-handed conversation, and I knew if he came away immediately it would mean that Lucille was either out or seeing no one. But he didn't, so it's obvious that Lucille is here. She doesn't realise that, I expect. After all, she's in this with the rest of us; the least she can do is to meet us squarely."

Rossiter said keenly, "I know what you want with her, of course. And I think you're within your rights when you insist. But don't keep her long. She's half-dead as it is."

He went out, leaving the door slightly ajar. Dick could hear him talking to someone in the passage. "My dear Bertha, it's no use. After all, the boy's within his rights. Lucille is still officially engaged to Denis Brinsley, and she's done nothing to break it off or take his part. She'll have to choose one side or the other. She needn't see him for more than a minute—I'll take care she isn't hard-pressed, but see him she must."

A minute later the door was pushed open slowly and Lucille came in. She seemed to have changed utterly from the aloof disdainful woman she had been a few weeks ago. There were deep hollows now in cheeks and temples; the eyes had lost that Mona Lisa look and were defensive, dark, afraid. . . . The subtle smile had altered and the lips were compressed. She was a woman who had stepped suddenly into a strange land and cannot see a step before her. She shut the door and said in a low voice, "Why did you come here? Weren't things bad enough?"

He said instantly, "I'm going to see Denis tomorrow, Lucille. Can I take him any message from you?"

Someone hesitated outside the door. Rossiter's voice said "Call me if you want me" and she called immediately, "Please, Cousin Julian, I want you now. Dick has come," she went on, holding herself taut and speaking in a dead level voice from which all feeling had been burned out, "to know if I have any message to send to Denis. Will you give him this from me?" She slipped a ring from her finger. Dick looked at it without offering to touch it.

"You mean that?"

"Yes."

"Then you believe he did this foul thing?"

Her voice was very tired; she could scarcely keep it steady. "I—don't—know. It doesn't seem to me to matter now. The awful thing was done fourteen years ago when he stole first Colonel Courcy's wife and then his life."

"Lucille!" The fury in the boy's voice made her start; her eyes in the white agony of her face were black and smouldering.

"He did," she cried.

Dick found dignity again. "If you can believe that it can't matter much to Denis what you do about his ring. I daresay he won't want it, but of course you mustn't be allowed to keep it."

"Brinsley!" broke in Rossiter sharply.

Lucille took advantage of a momentary silence to say in the same taut dreadful voice, "I did care. You think I didn't. But I did. And now it's over. I never want to hear his name again."

"I'm afraid," said Dick, his own voice trembling on the verge of an abyss of storm, "it won't be possible for you not to do that unless you become an anchorite. But may I promise you that you will never again hear it from me?"

He took the ring off the table. Lucille caught at her guardian's arm to steady herself. His hand closed round hers. She whispered, "I'm sorry, but nothing will matter any more. Tell them I couldn't help it. . . ." She had released herself without warning and gone. Dick heard a flutter of feet and then he was alone with his host. He took the jewel from the table and prepared to take his leave, but Rossiter spoke unexpectedly.

"One moment." He turned with an abrupt movement, and Dick could see that he, too, was feeling the strain of the days. "You think Lucille has behaved very badly; I put it to you that she has been very severely tried. The position against your brother is very strong; you or I might condone a great deal, but girls don't. She had an exaggerated view of him before—she isn't demonstrative and you probably didn't realise that—and the fall is all the worse because the original wall was so high. If Humpty Dumpty had been content with a stool he wouldn't have had so far to tumble and mightn't have been damaged. The fact of your brother's connection with a woman who was, put baldly, notorious, would have a reactionary effect on almost all women."

Dick thought of Lesley Gale, who would stick by him if he were ten times accused of murder. Nevertheless he felt a little for Rossiter. The fellow's

suave complacency had been rubbed off, though he still strove to maintain it like a smudged signature. He had a gaunt look that hadn't been there before. "You must remember," he was saying now, "she's young, she's got a good deal to offer. People will point at Denis all his life. Innocent or guilty it will be all the same. And it isn't fair to expect Lucille to ask nothing better than a share of that ill-fame."

"She won't have to," responded Dick curtly, and went off with the ring in his pocket.

2

Shortly after eight the next morning a man in a shabby bowler, an overcoat quite patently off the pegs and last year's at that, and a small black bag that had lost all its shape, stood negligently by the statue at Hyde Park Corner casually watching one of the houses. His time seemed unlimited. Presently he wandered along tapping the railings for a hundred yards or so, then drifted back. As nothing happened he went inside the railings, put the black bag on a seat and pulled a penny paper out of his pocket. He read diligently through one column after another, marking one or two of the "Situations Vacant" with a stubby pencil. Someone came and sat beside him. "Out of a job, mate?" Gordon nodded. "You too?" "On the dole." They talked for a time, and then the second man moved on. Gordon sat up alertly and looked at his back. He knew that walk; the man, cleverly disguised though he was, could not forbid recognition to his companion.

"And what's Annersley doing in this job?" he wondered. "Did he guess me? Oh, sure to. So they've put two and two together and know we're after them, and he's been told off to shadow me. That practically lets Brinsley out. You don't engage a man at Annersley's price unless you want to know something pretty badly. And he wants to know just where we stand. I suppose that young spark saw me following him last night."

He looked back at the house. Something was happening. A car had drawn up by the kerb and a tall pale figure was stepping into it. Gordon knew that it was Lucille Tudor and that his moment had arrived. He walked a little way in the direction Annersley had taken; a short distance ahead he saw his quarry reading a penny paper on another seat.

"Well," he reflected with a grin, "he can't follow me into the house, unless he calls himself a plumber."

As he rang the bell he observed the ne'er-do-weel rise and turn slowly in his direction.

A neat maid opened the door. Gordon flourished his little black bag.

"Mend the typewriter," he said.

The maid stared. "We haven't sent for anyone."

"Lady telephoned. Urgent, she said."

"She didn't tell me she'd rung up."

"She's got a typewriter?"

"Yes. One of these little ones they carry."

"That's right. The back spacer ain't working. Won't take me ten minutes."

"Well, I don't know. You're from Hardings?"

"Yes, that's right. I'll tell you the name." He brought out an indescribably grimy penny notebook

that he consulted carefully. "Miss Tudor. Portable Harding. Back spacer to repair."

"You'd better come up," said the maid doubtfully. "Miss Tudor's out." A stout gaudily-dressed woman met them in the hall. She looked at the man interrogatively. "Man to see to the typewriter, madam."

"Oh? Is there something wrong?"

"Miss Tudor," gabbled Gordon glibly for the second time and went through the business of consulting the notebook again.

"I suppose that's all right. But it oughtn't to be giving trouble already."

"A new machine, mum?"

"Yes, quite new."

"Shan't charge for it, then, unless it's an accident, machine dropped or something like that. Machines didn't ought to give trouble first year anyway. I'll report it." He laid his shabby hat on the table in the hall and followed the maid upstairs to Lucille's sitting-room. The typewriter stood open in a small case near the window. Gordon approached it professionally.

"Yes—quite a new one," he agreed. "Do you know how long the lady's had it?"

"About three months, I think."

"Was it bought in her name?"

"I couldn't say."

"Well, I can trace it anyhow by its number." He ran the roller to the left and looked at the number-plate. "Only three months? Lady's learning to type perhaps."

The maid, who was bred in the tradition that

you do not leave strange men alone in a room, pretended to dust the chimneypiece.

"Miss Tudor writes," she observed loftily.

"Oh? This isn't the first machine she's had?"

"No."

"I suppose she returned the other one when she got this? She'd get an allowance on it." He rattled the key energetically.

"Would she? No, I think she gave it away. What do they want with old machines anyhow?"

"Well, people who keep typewriting schools sometimes want 'em. Or people who're learning. I bought one myself the other day for my daughter. She's taking shorthand at the polytechnic, and then she's going to get a job in Hardings."

"Wish I could get a job like that," broke in the maid unexpectedly. "Better than service anyway."

"It's pretty hard work. My daughter's finding that. Ever tried a typewriter?"

She shook her head.

"Not even the old one?"

"No. It wasn't so very old, you know."

"Well, it wouldn't be. These haven't been on the market so very long. They weren't offered at a cheap rate till after the war."

"Expensive things, aren't they?"

"Not a second-hand one wouldn't be. But, of course, sometimes you get 'em given to you, like the lady Miss Tudor gave hers to."

"It wasn't a lady."

"No?"

"No. She gave it to this gent she was engaged to—this fellow who's in prison. A civil nice-spoken

fellow I thought him, but of course she wants the earth. He was saying he'd like to have a typewriter and she asked if 'e'd like hers, as she was having a new one."

"And he took it? Couldn't he buy himself one?"

"Why buy one when you can get it for nothing? 'Tisn't as if it had been used so much neither; Miss Tudor'll work for a hour and then shut up the box for three days."

"Funny her wanting a new one then."

"Well, I s'pose the new ones have new gadgets."

"That's true, of course. Did she give it him right away, on the nail so to speak?"

"Yes. She says why not take it at once and she'll put on a new ribbon and he says he'll be glad to."

"Was this machine in the house then?"

"No, this didn't come till three or four days later."

"That's the beginning of September, you say? I shall have to get them to look up the records and see just when it was bought."

"The beginning of September, I should think."

"Thank you very much, miss. I think this is all right now. Would you come and look at it?" He worked the back spacer several times very rapidly and rose.

"Want me to sign a paper, don't you?"

"No, we aren't charging anything, so there's no need. You take my tip, miss, don't you go into an office. You see much more life staying here."

"If you're thinking of this Sir Denis . . ."

"Well, there's him, and there's always interesting people in a place like this. Writers and artists. . . ."

"I reckon I'm about fed up with writers and artists. Treat you like dirt, they do. Give me the city gent who says 'Please, Mary, could you be a little more punc with the breakfast?' and you says 'Take it or leave it' and he says 'Thank you very much. I only mentioned it' and that night the missus says men are so unreasonable and raises you again."

"Aren't they int'resting?" He had shut up the typewriter and stood there a moment chatting idly. The room faced the Park and he could see Annersley wandering up and down waiting for him to emerge.

"Not them. Can't make out what they're talkin' about most of the time. The absolute beauty . . . all sorts of rubbish. That young Mr. Voisey now—ever heard of him?"

"Rather. See his books on all the stalls."

"Well, he practically lives here."

"Chap that found the body, isn't it?"

"That's right. Must ha' bin a bit nasty for him. Going straight there from here, too."

"What, straight from this house?"

"Well, must ha' done. Come here in the afternoon, he did, jest before dinner." The maid was ghoulishly interested now. She had forgotten the dusting. "Call it a day, that's what I said to Cook when I heard. Theatre in the afternoon, then rings up to know if he can come round most urgent to see Miss Tudor. . . ."

"What time's that?"

"Quarter to six."

"Good mem'ry you 'ave."

She looked coy. "Need it here, too."

"You took the message, I dessay?"

"No, Mr. Rossiter took it. He'd jest come in and hung up his coat when the bell rung, so he was nearest the phone, see? He says 'Wait a minute' and goes into the drawing-room where Miss Tudor is and says 'That's Gilbert. He wants to come and see you for five minutes. Can you spare the time?' She says 'I'm dining out. He'll have to be quick.' And at five minutes past six in he comes."

"Five past six? He takes his time to get 'ere then."

"Yes, that's right."

"Comes on foot p'raps?"

"On foot? Not him. Taxi always for my lord. What he has legs for I couldn't tell you, except to show off his fancy trousis."

"Stay long?"

"No; said he had a dinner somewhere, and the next thing we heard was he'd found the body."

"Terrible, that must ha' been."

The maid tossed her shingled head. "Serve 'em both right, I say. I don't hold with such goings-on meself."

Downstairs a bell pealed furiously. A voice said "Wheeler!" She opened the door hastily. "Yes, madam. The man's just finished the typewriter. I'm showing him out now."

Gordon took no notice of Annersley when he left the house. He was wondering how a man can get from Oxford Circus to Hyde Park in five minutes. Of course the maid might be mistaken in the time; it might have been a quarter past; it was possible that a swift taxi could have accomplished the journey in the time. The obvious thing was to discover

the driver of the cab but on the face of it that was impossible without a tremendous amount of publicity. An even more insuperable difficulty faced him. He had gleaned some extraordinarily valuable information during the past hour. He was now confirmed in his belief that Lucille Tudor was the murderer's accomplice, and probably Brinsley knew as much. But how on earth could any man telephone at a quarter to six if he was at that time in a bus half-way between South Kensington and Oxford Circus? Of course, he might alight from the vehicle and use a street box. . . . He stopped dead, amazed at his own folly. Of course, there was no proof that the man who had bought that ticket had ever travelled from Griffiths Square to Oxford Circus! He had only to take the ticket and alight at the end of the first stage. He could then telephone from anywhere he pleased. Wasn't that the obvious explanation? Voisey had taken a ticket from Griffiths Square, had alighted a few minutes later, carefully keeping the ticket, had telephoned Lucille and had then taken a taxi to her door. Whatever happened he must not be suspected of travelling by bus that night; on the other hand he would certainly know that Brinsley almost always went by bus. The delay in reaching Hyde Park was easily accounted for by the press of traffic at that hour. Still pondering the matter Gordon turned into a post office and telephoned to the Metropolitan Omnibus Co.

"I want to speak to Mr. Briscoe. Scotland Yard speaking."

There was a flutter and a moment later a new voice asked, "Is that Mr. Jamieson?"

"His assistant. Can you tell me at what period of the journey your inspector examined the ticket Mr. Jamieson showed you the other day?"

"I'll enquire. Hold on a minute." Gordon held on for some time. Exchange asked him twice if he wanted to renew his call and each time he said yes. At last Briscoe came through again.

"Just after leaving South Kensington."

"Thank you very much. Exactly what we thought."

"Sure you've got the actual murderer?"

"We're clearing up outstanding details," returned Gordon evasively. "I'm infinitely obliged to you. Good-bye."

That was a most reasonable explanation of the position. Still, he would have to find evidence that Voisey was actually with the dead woman at five o'clock. But why that hurried visit to Lucille Tudor if not to pass on to her the ticket and the blotting-paper? And why that return to his rooms but to procure the blotting-paper? Gordon saw the problem gradually smoothing itself out before him. He called another number, Arbuthnot's this time.

"Come right along," said Arbuthnot, "we've been hoping to hear from you. I'll try and get Mr. Egerton as well."

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHINK IN THE ARMOUR

1

EGERTON was already in the lawyer's office when Gordon arrived. Both listened with keen attention to the detective's report.

"Of course," he wound up, "there's still a lot of work to be done, but it's the groundwork of the case."

"And the motive?" queried Egerton expressionlessly.

"Some lover's quarrel, I should say."

"You don't think it was premeditated?"

"Why should it be? What did Voisey stand to gain?"

"The freedom to make Miss Tudor his wife."

Gordon stared. Egerton went on in the same wooden voice, "He's just become a widower, you know. And they tell me the gossip's been going round for at least twelvemonths."

"Why should he need to murder Mrs. Davenport?"

"For the same reason as Brinsley is supposed to have murdered her. Because she proposed to be an insuperable obstacle in his path. I don't mean she'd demand marriage—that would be absurd—but she

may either have blackmailed him, threatening to tell Miss Tudor of their liaison (I think I'm right in saying that the fact of the liaison is generally accepted?) or have been actuated by a real desire to keep him for her own property. I don't think the motive was jealousy because if he had any reason to suspect that she was sharing out her favours that would have been all to the good, for it would have let him out. And I'm certain he intends, under Providence, to marry Miss Tudor eventually. There's no thought in his mind, at all events, of Brinsley standing between them. As for her, I can't answer because I'm not acquainted with her; but I understand from Richard Brinsley that the engagement is already secretly cancelled."

"There's never been any suggestion from the police that Voisey was implicated, has there?" demanded Arbuthnot.

It was Gordon who answered him. "No. There wasn't a scrap of evidence against him. In point of fact, we've very little to substantiate our case now. Whereas there was a fistful against Brinsley. The Yard had no option but to run him in. But they aren't altogether happy about it. Don't think the Yard resents our activities. It welcomes them. They don't want to hang an innocent man any more than we do. May I put the case to you as far as I can see it at present? On the Monday afternoon Voisey goes to see Mrs. Davenport, possibly by appointment, possibly not. They talk and presumably quarrel; it may be about Miss Tudor or something we've no knowledge of. That doesn't really matter. I should say she made it quite clear that

he couldn't drop her like an old shirt as soon as he found it convenient, and Miss Tudor is hardly the type to relish so recent an affair on the part of the man she's proposing to marry. There's no doubt that Voisey has for some time meant to marry Miss Tudor if he can, be the motives as mixed as you please, and he sees in Mrs. Davenport a permanent obstacle. She will pursue him, torment him, ridicule him, cripple him. He waxes furious and attacks her. I don't know if you've ever seen these wiry muscular men at work; they are capable of tremendous feats of strength. And he was crazy with rage. The instant the thing's done he realises what he's let himself in for and immediately tries to find someone else on whom to shift the responsibility. It's natural, I think, that his mind should turn automatically to the man who for some time past has been deliberately usurping what he's grown to regard as virgin ground. His feeling when Miss Tudor announced her engagement to Sir Denis was probably something very like hatred. Here is a chance to repay him a hundredfold. As Madame's lover he very likely had access to her secrets. Probably he knew about the letters, or he may have broken open a drawer at random and found himself faced with a perfect motive. He is a remarkably quick young man; his brain moves nimbly; he is adjustable; he is cool-headed. All these things are of service to him now. He's been in Brinsley's company on various occasions; he notices small matters, like the pipe-lighter; he's a novelist, you see, of the realist school. It's part of his job to be always on the alert. Quite clearly if Brinsley has been the murderer, he argues,

he wouldn't have those letters as evidence against him. But it will be possible to leave a trace on the blotting-paper to reveal their existence. In fact, it's probable that the trace Jamieson found was actually the imprint of Mrs. Davenport's hand-writing. So it will be safe to burn those. On the other hand, he leaves the threats, knowing they have been typed on a machine now belonging to Brinsley."

"You assume then that he is the blackmailer?" put in Egerton.

"I think that could be quite well explained. This Mlle. Lecoq is probably another chapter of his—emotional existence. She would give him all the necessary information. The next thing to be done is to persuade the fly to enter the parlour. I've heard from the L. T. S. that four calls were put through from the flat that afternoon, and I think we've traced the lot. First, of course, is the call that got through to Miss Margetson at the laboratory asking if Brinsley was there, and was mysteriously cut off. Now it's usual, if you're cut off, to badger the Exchange instantly and get through again with practically no delay. But it's five minutes or more before the same voice asks for Sir Denis. In the interim there's been time to telephone his house. It was very nicely planned. Since Brinsley himself may quite well not give the evidence necessary to convict him, a second string must be provided that shall not fail. There's your reason for the first call, which is merely to discover where Sir Denis is. Having ascertained that he's at Griffiths Square the murderer rings off and gets on to his house. By this time he's laid the trail far enough to ensure that

one other man knows that Mrs. Davenport has sent an urgent message to her friend, Sir Denis Brinsley, to come at once. It's most important, of course, that it shall be at once and the murderer is horribly nettled when Brinsley spoils his plans by saying he's engaged. An hour's delay may ruin the scheme; Voisey hasn't banked on that, but he hits a brilliant plot to give the appearance of truth and that will serve him better than if Brinsley has actually agreed. Because he'd have telephoned the police before he'd been an instant in the flat and they might have traced the murderer that way. Then he puts through the other two calls, one to Notting Hill Gate and the other, in Graham's name to Griffiths Square. That was his real risk, that when Brinsley left the laboratory, and he could safely bank on his doing that, he'd go to his club or in some other way be able to prove a perfectly unshakable alibi. But I think we may take it that a murderer so farseeing as this one would realise that he would avoid his club, in case Graham tracked him there. For the same reason he wouldn't go home. So he would either call on someone Graham couldn't be expected to know, or wander about. Anyone who knows Brinsley knows that it's fairly safe to count on his doing the last. Anyway that risk must be taken. Having so far got things arranged he leaves the flat, having changed the hands of the clock so as to suggest that Mrs. Davenport was actually alive at five-thirty. You see, having said in every message that that was the time he could easily arrange his own alibi by turning into his rooms at five-twenty, thus proving that he couldn't have been at Pontifex Man-

sions at five-thirty. Of course, it's touch and go. I daresay Mrs. Davenport was actualy murdered several minutes before five. That would give Voisey time to set the stage. Thin ice, I admit, but thin ice sometimes holds. Leaving his rooms he walks to Griffiths Square, which is quite close by, catches an east-bound bus, takes a fourpenny ticket, gets off a few minutes later and immediately telephones Miss Tudor. Then he takes a taxi to her door. His own alibi is complete; it isn't reasonable to suppose that anyone will suspect him, but in any case he considers that he's covered up his tracks. He meets Miss Tudor, tells her what's happened, plants the ticket and blotting-sheet upon her . . ."

"Aren't you assuming a good deal when you suggest that she'll deliberately blaze the trail against the man she's engaged to marry?" asked Egerton in his soft dry voice.

"We are," the lawyer answered before Gordon could speak. "But I've a deal more experience of female human nature than you can possibly have, Egerton, and I've learned that when it comes to law and order most women are born imbeciles. To get the man she wants, to protect him from the consequences of his own folly, I verily believe there's no blackguardism at which a passionate woman will hesitate. Miss Tudor may have loathed the idea of falling in with the detestable scheme, but even more than that she loathed the thought of her lover dangling . . ."

Egerton's brows went up. "Her lover?"

"I think there's no doubt about that. I've been making enquiries and I find that she stayed at a

hotel as his wife no further ago than the spring. I understand now that Voisey's wife is dead, which cuts one Gordian knot, but the past can't be blotted out."

"Suppose," suggested Egerton very low, "he holds that—past—over her head as a threat? A man who's murdered a woman won't stop short at a little bit of beastliness like that."

"It's quite possible. There aren't many women who can face that kind of scandal, particularly if there's a murder thrown in."

Gordon turned to the young man. "Believe me, Mr. Egerton, this may seem to you a bit far-fetched and melodramatic, but our experience points to what Mr. Arbuthnot has just said."

"I also," agreed Egerton in a voice of chill disgust, "am not entirely without knowledge." Arbuthnot knew that he was thinking of Lady Chandos, who had deliberately shielded the murderer of her husband, who had incidentally been one of Egerton's gods. So the story of Lucille Tudor was by no means incredible. But for the moment he said nothing but waited for the detective to continue.

"That's practically the end," said Gordon. "He persuades her either by threats or by playing on her feelings, and the next morning she goes round to the Brinsleys' house and leaves the clues there. You agree to that?" He faced Egerton again as if he suspected scepticism in that silent young man's mind.

But Egerton nodded drearily. "Oh yes," he said. "That's unquestionable. It was Miss Tudor who left the evidence there. There's no one else."

"Then having got her help Voisey goes off and

has his dinner with Wyndham Grain and during the dinner or afterwards—I don't know which and it doesn't really matter (I gather it's an idiosyncrasy of Grain's to dine ridiculously early) he either suggests or contrives to make the painter suggest that Mrs. Davenport is a good subject for his brush. The rest you know. Of course, Voisey acts on the assumption that the police won't suspect the man who gives warning of the murder."

"A very neat deduction," agreed the lawyer. "Unfortunately we haven't much proof at the moment. We shall have to lie low for a bit till we have something better to go on. It's a pity no one can swear to Mrs. Davenport having visitors on the day of her death."

"It seems to me," put in Egerton a trifle caustically, "that there's quite a lot you'll find it uncommonly difficult to prove. Your theory is that this murder was committed by Voisey who managed to throw the blame on another man with Miss Tudor's connivance. But you've yet to account for two rather difficult things. One, how did Brinsley's sleeve get burnt? You aren't suggesting Miss Tudor did that in the instant she waited in the hall; and the other, who typed the letters? If the machine passed into Brinsley's hands before the first letter was received it's pretty obvious that they were sent from his flat. If you don't allow that either he or Dick is responsible, who is?"

"There's the servant, Mayes," returned the lawyer, frowning. "That point about the letters had struck me, too. I fancy Mayes is our only answer. I'll have his record hunted out."

"Do you keep a record of every man in this country, I mean does Scotland Yard?" demanded the young politician incredulously.

"No. But if he's any kind of a criminal the Yard will know."

"Perhaps he isn't. Perhaps he's merely hard-pressed. Perhaps he's been betting and lost money. The murderer may have taken advantage of a temporary difficulty. Every man, they say, has his price."

"Of course, Brinsley could tell us," mused Arbuthnot.

"Of course he could. But then he could have told us about the typewriter and he didn't. Similarly, if there's anything to Mayes' disadvantage in his past you aren't likely to get it out of Denis."

"The man must be crazy! Does he want to be hanged for murder?"

"I think he'd rather be hanged than implicate people for whom he cares or in whom he has an interest."

"I can understand Miss Tudor. I think it's wrong-headed and as a lawyer I consider it damnably unfair. But some men are born cranks. But Mayes—Mayes is his servant."

"Denis' servants are generally his friends. He's like that. You won't mind my suggesting that I know him rather better than you do? If he were convinced Mayes were a party to the plot he might give evidence against him, though it would go against the grain. But until he's convinced he'll be more silent than the grave."

"More silent?" questioned Arbuthnot, angry at the turn things were taking.

"Even the conquering worm, I believe, has jaws."

Arbuthnot shrugged. "We're assuming, of course, that Mayes has a dark secret."

"A thing Denis would never assume. You see where the roads divide? I question if he'll ever come on to yours."

"Confound the fellow! Why do I like him? There's something—no, I'm not a sentimentalist. I abhor them. Well, if he won't tell us, there are other ways. Gordon, this is your job."

Nevertheless, he determined to tackle his client, pointing out to him that there was no chance of his winning his case unless he put all the cards on the table. He went down to see him the next morning.

2

Scott Egerton was right. He was usually right and in this instance his judgment proved unerring. Denis Brinsley had nothing to say on the subject of Mayes.

"It's merely a question of time," Arbuthnot pointed out coldly. "We shall discover this chap's past in the end; but you could save us a great deal of trouble if you'd be candid now."

Denis negatived that. "It's no more to do with Mayes than the man in the moon."

"You think not? If that's true he needn't be afraid of his past coming out."

"A man may be as innocent as a virgin saint and yet the fact that he was once under the weather will prejudice outsiders. I always think it's infernally unfair not to let a man live down his mistakes."

"Unfortunately," commented Arbuthnot drily, "it isn't always possible. You're proving that yourself. Old sins they say have long shadows."

"True. I've reflected on that often enough since I've been in this den. One has plenty of opportunity for reflection. It upsets all my pet theories about self-determination. I think if a man gets into a morass it's probably his own fault."

"So it is," agreed his lawyer unsympathetically. "This long shadow stretches from fourteen years ago. There's another axiom about the mills of God."

"If you consider God has anything to do with this kind of sordid affair!" Denis shrugged. "I'm sorry, sir, but it would be a breach of trust. If I thought there was the faintest chance of Mayes being implicated . . ."

Arbuthnot rose to deliver his last shaft. "There's no need for me to waste more time. But we shall find out this man's record just as we discovered the history of the typewriter."

His companion was suddenly deathly pale. "You have?" He didn't even feign indifference.

"We know it came from Miss Tudor."

Denis spoke with sudden energy. "Allow me to remind you that it came into my possession before the first letter demanding money was sent to Mrs. Davenport."

"What on earth is the fellow driving at?" puzzled Arbuthnot, as he was driven back to his office. "Either he knows a great deal more about the affair than he'll admit or he suspects that Miss Tudor does. I wonder if he's even indirectly guilty. I've

never seen a man charged with murder so apparently apathetic about his own fate. He's infinitely more concerned about this girl and even about his servant than about himself. I wonder if Mayes knows something and Brinsley daren't speak. There are too many mysteries in this affair to please me. Now Gordon must do his damnedest."

Before putting the matter wholly into the detective's hands, however, he telephoned to Dick Brinsley, asking him to come to his office at once. Dick wasted no time; he was, to use Arbuthnot's phrase, in the office by the time the receiver was hung up.

"I want you to help me if you can, Mr. Brinsley. Will you tell me everything you know about your servant, Mayes? We have to explore every possible avenue, you'll understand."

"Of course. I'm afraid I can't tell you much. My brother found him somewhere during the war and brought him back with him."

"Did he never tell you anything of his past history?"

Dick wrinkled his smooth brows. "I'm afraid not. I know he has a past—as the novelettes so graphically put it. As if we haven't all got a past!"

"A possibly discreditable past?"

"I gather there's something he'd rather was never dug up."

"But you don't know what it is?"

"No. I was prepared to rely on my brother's judgment. He wanted to give the fellow a leg up."

"But he might have been a professional thief. That was scarcely fair to you. Even if one's posses-

sions aren't worth the Mint one likes to preserve them."

"Oh, he offered to tell me. He said that was only square. But, as I say, I was ready to take his word for it. And anyhow we took equal chances. After all, it wasn't my affair and it was much more comfortable for Mayes to feel no one but Denis knew. I remember when I was a schoolboy someone in our village gave a job as parlourmaid to a girl who'd been in trouble; but she told everyone in the place about it, how she wanted to extend a helping hand, and the girl drowned herself. I was one of the party that found her." He shuddered. "So I could feel for Mayes."

"Sir Denis never dropped any hints?"

"Only to say that he'd had bad luck and deserved another chance."

"I see. I'm afraid that doesn't help."

"But you aren't imagining poor old Mayes is mixed up in this? Why, I'll go bail he isn't. He's utterly devoted to Denis—the-blood-of-my-heart and so forth attitude."

Arbuthnot nodded shortly. "I've heard that before, if you will forgive my saying so. I think we shall have to have some more information about the man. Please treat this conversation as strictly confidential."

Dick, looking rather perplexed, agreed.

The next day Gordon went once more to Notting Hill Gate. Mayes admitted him as usual.

"I want to see that typewriter again," said Gordon. "It's been returned here, hasn't it? We're on a new trail."

Mayes, coldly disapproving, showed him into the dining-room, and himself stayed in the doorway as if anticipating possible demands.

"Do you know how to type?" asked Gordon, slipping a sheet of paper under the roller.

"No, sir."

"Never touched a machine?"

"Never come my way, sir."

"No? Ah well, it's a useful accomplishment."

"Not always, sir." His tone was bitter. Gordon wondered for a moment if he was thinking of the past, then realised that his thoughts were with the man now in prison.

"You think you're better off as—what do you call yourself, Mayes?—a gentleman's gentleman?"

"I couldn't say, sir. I used to say butler, but of course there's no sense in sticking to labels in a house where there's no one under you."

"That's what you were before the war, then?"

But Mayes only said evasively, "Things change, sir, sometimes one way, sometimes t'other."

Gordon laughed a little. "Did you ever hear of Newman Noggs?"

"No, sir. I don't go in for betting these days."

"You did once, I expect? We all try it and find the game isn't worth the candle." He was watching the other man narrowly as he spoke, and saw a slight stiffening of the whole figure. Casually opening a case he carried he put in the sheet he had just taken out of the machine, and as he turned over some papers one slipped out and floated along almost to Mayes' feet. It was so neatly done that it didn't accur to Mayes to suspect the little fillip that

had sent it so far. He stopped to restore it, and saw that it was a photograph.

"Thanks, Mayes. To look at her you'd never think she was a murderess, would you?"

Thus appealed to Mayes looked more carefully at the portrait. It showed a woman in a dress of the Watteau period, with a wide-brimmed hat poised lightly on exquisite golden curls; she was smiling, one finger held to her lip. A beautiful woman—an extraordinarily beautiful woman. But Mayes regarded her stonily. He'd met some pretty good lookers himself as a young man and he knew you couldn't trust appearances.

"Quite right," agreed Gordon. "That woman cold-bloodedly poisoned her husband, her brother and her son, aged ten, for the sake of gain. And all the time she looked like an angel. She nursed the husband and son devotedly, chuckling inwardly at the realisation that only a very few weeks stood between her and what she wanted. She actually wore that costume within a month of her husband's death and a week before the child was taken ill. One might," he wound up disgustedly, "find some kind of excuse for the husband and brother; at all events they'd known her long enough to realise what she was, but the child—no! That was vile—unforgivable."

"Who was she?" asked Mayes with morbid interest.

"Turn the photograph over."

The man did so and saw the name—Marcelle Thirsk—written on the back. "You remember the case?"

"No, sir. It's not a very recent one, is it?"

"The trial took place, so far as memory serves me, in 1909."

"She was found guilty?"

"Of course."

"And they hanged her?" There was fierce hatred in the voice.

"No," returned Gordon oddly, "they didn't do that. She was too clever. She'd had a good stock of poisons, you see, and the ring trick was sometimes successful in those days. But they buried her in quicklime for all that."

Mayes handed back the photograph without comment. The detective took it carefully and put it between the sheets of tissue paper in his case. Then, having got what he had come for, he shut up the typewriter and left the flat. He decided, a shade regretfully, that proceedings had reached the point where Scotland Yard must be taken into his confidence. He went thither immediately.

"These," he said to the Chief about forty minutes later, presenting the photograph of Marcelle Thirsk, "are the man's finger-prints. His age, I should say, is somewhere about forty-eight or nine. He's five foot eleven, broad-shouldered, grey eyes, dark hair growing thin, has a twisted thumb on the left hand, was once a butler, has probably been in jug some time."

"He'll hardly be in the Rogues Gallery, I suppose?" suggested the Chief, "but you might take a look round while I have these finger-prints tested."

But Gordon found no one remotely resembling Mayes. He thought of the possibility of his having

shaved a moustache since the affair, whatever it was, but discarded that theory on the ground that a moustachioed butler was unthinkable. He might conceivably have dyed his hair, but he couldn't change the shape of his head, which was distinctive, with high temples and a long chin and the nose of a pugilist.

It was some time later that they ran him to earth under the name of Thomas Ernest Bowers. Mayes appeared to have been his mother's name. He had been, as he said, a butler prior to the War and in 1913 had been convicted of forgery. The defence was that he had got into trouble through betting and in desperation had set his employer's name to an open cheque. This man, whose name was Wise, seemed to have been the reverse in his dealings with his servants. He left cheque-books and money about haphazard; he wrote a clear flowing signature that was amazingly easy to copy. He would send his butler to the Bank to cash cheques and would frequently take the notes without counting them. And so, in the hour of temptation, when he saw nothing but dishonour in front of him, Mayes took a risk that might not prove very dangerous after all and forged a cheque for twenty pounds. It was quite common for Wise to send the butler down to the Bank to draw that amount on a bearer cheque, uncrossed, and the matter occasioned no comment at the time. But by ill-luck—from Mayes' point of view—Wise at that time decided that his private correspondence justified a private secretary, an efficient, sardonic, sycophantic young man who immediately unearthed the affair of the cheque and

insisted—no other word was possible—that his employer should prosecute. Wise, a weak good-natured man, was prepared to dismiss his servant and leave it at that. Johnson, the secretary, pointed out that by so doing he was leaving a potential criminal at large among innocent and defenceless citizens. More, he was promoting the man's spiritual downfall since, if Mayes found that his sole penalty was loss of employment he would clearly be tempted to repeat his offence. So the police were summoned and a great deal was said about abuse of trust, and unreliable characters and the upshot of it was that Mayes found himself in prison for three years. He was released in 1916 and attempted to join the Army, only to find that his prison record barred him, and he drifted about, making munitions, for twelve months, until the crying need for men in the trenches caused the War Office to lift their ban on gaol-birds and he went out in the autumn of 1917. In the New Year he met Denis and became his batman, and when both were demobilised he returned to Notting Hill Gate where he rendered services that would have earned him three times his modest wages in any large establishment. But he would have worked at that time for his board alone. He knew now how ex-convicts were generally received, and he appreciated more even than the brothers could guess the fact of Denis keeping the story completely to himself.

"Suppose," ruminated Gordon coming away from the Yard, "he found himself a second time in a similar strait? Or suppose he's nothing but a gorgeous humbug? What if he was tempted by the offer of

money and undertook to complete the trail Miss Tudor had begun? But would Voisey take the risk? Or was there anything between the two before this?" It was feeling wholly in the dark. He sighed, for the task in front of him was a heavy one. Then he turned into a Turkish Bath and sweating contentedly began to plan his next line of action.

CHAPTER XV

THE CONFESSION

THERE was an interminable discussion going on in the House concerning certain foreign goods. One member after another rose and drifted into an incredibly dull monologue as to why the country should or should not import them. The vexed question of Reparations was dragged from its grisly, ill-favoured grave and the word made great play among the less intelligent members. Scott Egerton lay back with folded arms and listened. He was fortunate in possessing that type of brain that can listen and think along quite opposite lines. So that while he heard the ridiculous or abstruse comments of his colleagues his mind was busy with ways and means for effecting Denis Brinsley's release. The only way was to find the real murderer. And it looked as though it was going to be almost impossible to gate him. A stray word from the discussion going on around him reverberated in his thoughts. Logic. Yes, that was the starting-point of the affair as well as its conclusion. You might have half a hundred suspicions and as many conclusive ideas to support them, but logic demanded proof. Egerton, who was essentially a logical man, demanded proof too. And he couldn't get it. Not getting things irritated him to the point of ill-

humour. Some braying jackass was still on his feet; they said that Bendersley occupied more space in Hansard than any other private member in the course of the year. Egerton could readily believe that. What was he talking about now? The state of unemployment—our pledge to the men who won the war—British goods first. . . . At last he sat down. Egerton rose, suggested languidly that the men who won the war were surely entitled to the best, referred to the last speaker's comments, and added that if some other country could produce better articles, it was obvious, on his showing, that they should be imported. He added a rider on the necessity for international trade by an island community and sat down to be immediately tackled by a policeman who handed him a small green card, which means that someone has come up to interview 'my Member.' Egerton took it, saw that it read "Miss Tudor. Private. Urgent," and rose again at once, following the policeman out of the Hall and down to the wooden barrier where two more policemen walked up and down heralding the advance of each separate member in stentorian voices. "Mr. James. Mr. James," they shouted, as a large man with a shabby grey moustache and grey hair and stooped shoulders appeared. A small man who wanted to know why he couldn't claim a perpetual war pension ran forward and the two vanished. An instant later the policemen called "Mr. Egerton. Mr. Egerton," and the girl in black with a half veil shading her eyes moved out of the little crowd gathered round the gangway and approached him.

"Come this way," suggested Egerton, as they

shook hands, and led her into a corridor on the left; huge oil paintings hung in alcoves and beneath them were narrow red plush seats. Hardly anyone was here, only the stooping member and the little man who wanted a pension who gesticulated fiercely at the further end.

"I wondered," said Egerton slowly, "if—when you would come."

"You—guessed then? I felt you had."

"I understood."

There was a long silence, then Lucille spoke again, and this time there was a spasm of fear in her voice. "They mustn't hurt Denis," she whispered.

"They've done that already."

"But they musn't bring in—mustn't say . . ."

"Find him guilty of murder, you mean?"

"No." The agony in her face was terrible, but Egerton appeared unmoved. Possibly he was thinking of a kindred agony in Denis' heart. When he spoke, however, his voice was unusually gentle.

"You must save him," he said.

She flinched at that. "I? I don't know . . ."

He was inexorable. "Oh yes, you do. You've hurt him enough as it is, more than all the rest of them. No one but you could really hurt him beyond healing, and you've done that. Now you must come into the open. We're on the right man's track, and we have got a good deal of evidence."

"Including mine?"

"Including yours."

"You know why I went to the flat that morning?"

"Yes. That was his idea, of course."

She cried out, "I didn't realise what I was doing."

"No. I quite believe that. But even so Denis mustn't suffer. Even if you were only that man's dupe . . ."

"I was," she cried passionately. "You know I was."

"Yes," repeated Egerton slowly. "I know it. But I don't suppose anyone else will."

"They think it was a cold-blooded plot?" Her distress was dreadful to see; Lucille, the calm, the majestic, the exquisite, the remote, broken like any other common clay on the wheel of a great folly and an awful fear.

"What else?" asked Egerton and his light brows rose as he met her glance.

She was silent for a time. "You think I shall have to tell all the facts?"

"I know you will."

"Would Denis . . . ?" she seemed to realise the appalling cowardice of that and stopped.

"No," Egerton finished for her. "He wouldn't. He'd rather hang than hear what people will say of you—are bound to say of you—when they know. But he mustn't be allowed to hang."

She shivered again, a long slow movement that shook her from head to foot.

"Besides," he added, "it's more than Denis. They're dragging Mayes into it, and he can't afford that."

"Oh, Mayes!" She shrugged him aside. He was nothing to her.

"He's a good deal to himself," murmured Egerton.

"He's got me absolutely in his power," she broke out again. "I've only to breathe a word and he'll give his version, and that's the one everyone will believe."

"I'm afraid they will. I'm afraid you'd believe it yourself if you heard it of another woman, or would have done before this happened. We only learn tolerance by our own experience."

"It's impossible for you to understand really," she went on, and now her manner was calmer and her words followed one another coherently, instead of stumbling for utterance, "you can stand by yourself. I can't. When the truth is known I shall be generally shunned. Can they imprison me as an accomplice?"

"They may try," Egerton warned her soberly. "It's hard to persuade courts and people of innocent stupidity."

She coloured a little; such candour was unusual and not very palatable to her.

"Even if they don't," she went on, "I shall be like a frayed end. I shan't fit in anywhere. And I've nothing at all but my social life, my acquaintances. I shall lose all those. Do you think I don't know what they'll say? They'll laugh at my explanations."

She saw a change in his expression and thought "How he despises me for thinking of myself now, when Denis has thought of no one but me from the beginning! I'd like to have this man for my friend." For she had few friends whom she could trust; even Denis didn't realise how essentially lonely was her life.

"They will," said Egerton in a level voice. "But it's no use your moving yet. You haven't sufficient proof. Oh, he's been diabolically clever. He's got you tied to his chariot wheel. If you move the wheel moves too, crushing you. He's counting on your not moving, and the wheel remaining stationary. But you'll have to move later, when we have proof. Even you couldn't produce that at present, nothing that would carry weight in a court of law. The balance of evidence is still heavily against Denis—evidence you helped to produce."

"Must you remind me of that?" she asked. She was white as paper; her thin beautiful hands, beautiful even through their gloves, were folded in her lap; the extreme pallor of her face accentuated its delicacy and spirituality; the lips met one another firmly enough for all her dread. Egerton felt supreme compassion for her, though normally he disliked the Pauline injunction to suffer fools. He thought, on the whole, he'd rather have been Denis during these past weeks than this girl.

"What is there you could bring?" he asked.

"The blotting-paper."

"Could you prove it was his?"

"I don't suppose so. He'd probably see to it that I couldn't."

"Then that's useless for the moment. What else? The typewriter?"

"Yes, there's that."

"It was his suggestion, of course, that you should give it away."

"Yes. I was so blind I didn't see. And anyway I

didn't suspect. He acted so well; I thought he cared for me. He always seemed to, and I believed him. I never once guessed about this woman. I thought it was just because he was married. . . ."

"He typed the notes himself, of course, on your machine when he came to see you in your room?"

"Yes, and when Denis said laughingly that he wanted a machine he asked me why I didn't get a new one and let Denis have this. I didn't think at first he'd care for it; it had various ugly little tricks, but he jumped at the idea. I hadn't realised he was so poor he couldn't afford even that."

There was scorn mingled with Egerton's compassion as he said, "Do you think that was why he wanted it? Do you know he wouldn't let another soul touch it, just because it had been yours?"

"No, no," she whispered and for an instant he averted his eyes before the terrible humiliation in hers. "I didn't know that."

"You can't prove, of course, that he did actually type the letters," he went on presently. "It wasn't much for him to borrow your machine. No, I think you must wait and watch. Does he suspect you're coming to see me?"

"Oh no, I don't suppose so. He doesn't follow all my movements; sometimes I hardly see him for days together. But if he did know, then I think he would kill me as he killed her. I came to the House because then if I were seen it might be thought I was going to the Army and Navy Stores."

"You weren't followed?"

"I don't think so."

"Notice particularly on your way back. I've been

shadowed—he's as nervous as that—and so have others of the Defence Corps. A man in danger of his life trusts no one. I think we'd better separate now. You don't want to increase suspicions. And don't forget Mayes. They don't understand, you see, how diabolically cleverly the whole thing was done. It's natural they should think he's implicated. And it may mean something dearer to him than his life if this isn't cleared up pretty soon. I'll get them to call you a taxi. You're less likely to be noticed if you come out by the private door at the side the secretaries use. Don't forget to watch if you're shadowed and above all things don't write. It isn't safe. I'll make some opportunity in case of further news. But please don't delude yourself. Nothing but the truth will set Denis free. Nothing else," he added wryly, shutting the taxi-door, "ever does."

As she crossed the hall of the house in Hyde Park Lucille ran into Bertha Rossiter.

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost," she commented. "My dear girl, you can't look like that to-night. You've been shopping all the afternoon, I suppose, walking miles in those awful Stores, at Christmas time too. Have you forgotten about to-night?"

"What's happening to-night?" Lucille felt and sounded too much exhausted for further effort.

"We're going to this dance at the Grosvenor Galleries. Gilbert will meet us there."

"I can't meet him," cried Lucille desperately, "Cousin Bertha, I can't."

But though Julian Rossiter upheld her, saying that she should do precisely as she pleased, Lucille

did go in the end, because she couldn't face the prospect of a blank evening agonising in advance the pangs and bitterness that both she and Egerton anticipated for her when she made public confession.

CHAPTER XVI

EGERTON PLAYS THE ACE

1

EARLY next morning Mayes received a telegram summoning him to Scotland Yard forthwith. He showed it a little dubiously to Dick, who was on the point of departure for the Lucan Works.

"Another tooth-combing in search of non-existent evidence, I suppose," murmured Dick. "After all, we can't blame the police. Perhaps, though, they think you and I did it in collusion. I rather wonder they haven't suggested that before. We've had such magnificent opportunities to lay a false trail."

Mayes looked at him strangely, but Dick was fastening the belt of his Burberry and didn't notice.

"You'll have to go, of course," he added, looking up. "I hope you'll be back in time to feed me tonight. Or—better still—I'll dine with the Gales. I shan't be back till eleven. Sit up for me."

Mayes, with a secret misgiving, for the knowledge of his past gnawed him persistently, and he cherished an inward terror lest it should rise and strangle him even now, set the flat in order and went gloomily out. A quarter of an hour later a tall man knocked up the caretaker and said, "Scotland Yard. I want to get into Sir Denis Brinsley's flat. Have you a passkey?"

The caretaker looked at him askance. "It's against the rules," she muttered sullenly.

Jamieson showed his credentials. "You'd much better let me in without a fuss," he advised her.

"Suppose Mr. Brinsley makes a fuss?" she demanded. She was a belligerent woman of five-and-forty whom a drunken husband had soured towards all mankind.

"I'll take the chance," he said brusquely. "Bring the key along at once, please."

Still grumbling she let him into the flat. Then she settled herself suspiciously in the hall. For half an hour faint sounds could be heard on the other side of the door. Then Jamieson came out and brushed past her.

Mayes all this time had been interrogated by the officials who insisted on tracing the relationship between himself and Thomas Ernest Bowers, one-time convict. Mayes sullenly admitted the facts. He would have denied them if denial would have helped him. But he knew it would not. But he did most bitterly resent this probing into an unhappy past.

"What d'you want to do it for?" he demanded passionately. "That's done with."

"That's all right," he was assured. "We aren't going to take the front page of the *Daily Mail* for your benefit."

"No one need ha' known—not ever," continued Mayes fiercely. "Why, even Mr. Brinsley don't know."

"We shan't tell him."

Then Jamieson telephoned that he had examined every corner of the flat and Mayes' quarters in par-

ticular, and had found nothing whatsoever to indicate that he was pressed for money or had any connection with anyone who might require an accomplice, and that his record from the time of his Army service appeared to be perfectly clean. Whereupon Scotland Yard politely told Mayes that he was free to go, assured him that his secret would never leak out through them and showed him off the premises.

Jamieson passed this information on to Gordon, who called him up a little later. Gordon scowled.

"That's a nuisance. Wonder if the fellow's really a fly criminal. Otherwise—how?"

He pondered a long time but came to no sort of conclusion.

2

Three days later Egerton got an urgent telegram from his constituency. There was trouble rising rapidly over the experiment of the coal and iron interests in assisting the farmers. Both sides considered the other's objections unreasonable, and Egerton's agent sent for him post-haste. Egerton took the next train, leaving his wife to fulfil his social engagements, and spent forty-eight hours oblivious to Denis Brinsley's distress and Lucille Tudor's agony of mind. At the end of that time, having restored amity between the conflicting parties he came back to town and went straight to his club. Here he found two letters. The first was addressed in small decisive characters, and he saw without much surprise Lucille Tudor's signature at the foot. The situation had become too strained

for her and she had disregarded his urgent plea that she should not write; that alone showed him how vast was her despair. The note was very brief beginning without any sort of address and was written on a gilt-edged correspondence card.

If you have any evidence for his sake and mine give it to them now. The thought of Denis imprisoned for that man's crime haunts me night and day. I will tell them everything you think necessary. But oh! don't wait any longer.

LUCILLE TUDOR

He made a mental note to call upon her the following day. The other letter came as a far greater shock. Scotland Yard had not been the only activity to set on foot enquiries as to the whereabouts of the mysterious Mlle. Lecoq of whom so much mention had been made by the anonymous correspondent. Gordon had also sent a cable, and Egerton, believing that if you want a thing done well you should do it yourself, had set in motion yet a third wheel. This letter was the answer to his urgency. It consisted of a short covering note written in perfect though slightly uneducated French. It said

Sir,

With reference to your enquiries regarding my sister, Mlle. Annette Lecoq (subsequently Mme. Pelac). Not knowing if you normally reside at your club or at your private address that I have obtained from a list of parliamentary members, I venture to send to you a copy of a letter addressed to your house by the same post. You are, of course, free to put this information at the disposal of your English police if you should wish.

Your obedient servant,

BERTRAND LECOQ

The enclosure was much longer and was also written in French. Egerton looked at the address and saw that it was an English one, an address in one of those would-be suburbs of greater London, about an hour's journey from town. The letter itself was written in a flowing pointed foreign hand. At the top of this second sheet was the word "COPY."

Sir (the letter began)

I understand that you seek news of my sister, Mademoiselle Annette Lecoq, one-time personal maid to Madame Hilary Courcy of Rocqueville. I have read in the English papers that my sister is supposed to be in league with the murderer of Madame Courcy in trying to obtain money from her. This is a cruel falsehood. My sister has been dead these four years, and whoever has used her name does so knowing that she cannot speak for herself. Also he perhaps supposed that there was now no one to defend her. Sir, there is some dark and wicked plot on foot to throw blame on my sister, who was much devoted to Mme. Courcy and who would never have done anything to inconvenience her. It is not for me to say whether or no the lady did poison her husband, but I have recently come into possession of a piece of information that would tell you the name of Mme. Courcy's lover at that time who is, I think, her murderer now; I would, of course, be prepared to offer proofs of all that I say. It is said that the man accused of the murder is your friend, and if you wish to clear him you could perhaps come to see me here. I am in every afternoon, but in the morning I teach French to the pupils of two ladies who have a small school here. You will see that I dare not come to London with my news in case he should discover me, for he would murder me without regret as he murdered that poor lady and (I think) her husband before her. My

house is at the foot of the Common, not more than ten minutes from the station. We would be quite alone for I am not in a position to keep a servant; my wife is busy with her sewing all day and I should feel safe here in my own house.

Forgive, sir, the length of this letter. I would tell you now if I dared, the name of the man, but I think you are on the right track. The police are quite wrong. I will expect you, sir, in a day or two.

Your obedient servant,
BERTRAND LECOQ

Egerton read the letter through twice before setting it aside. Then he consulted a pocket diary and afterwards a Bradshaw. He could get down to Roxham in about an hour. This man might be expected to talk for the best part of another hour. A man with proofs is apt to be loquacious.

"I wonder how the deuce one gets hold of clues fourteen years after a murder," he reflected. "Interesting to learn. And so Mlle. Lecoq is dead. What a cunning devil he is! He banked, of course, on Mrs. Davenport not knowing that. Once let that secret slip and his scheme was ended. But to blackmail a woman with threats of exposure through a corpse is rather original. It would hardly occur to her that he couldn't fulfil his threats. I shall have to go, I'm afraid. To-morrow I'll see Miss Tudor. I could go to Roxham this afternoon. I won't send a wire as the fellow seems nervous." He chuckled grimly. "I think we're almost at the end of the trail now, and a pretty dirty trail it's been."

He delayed long enough to go back to his house and write out a detailed statement of his suspicions

up to the present, adding "Miss Tudor could fill in gaps if necessary." This he sealed and put on the mantelpiece in his library.

"I have to go out this afternoon," he told Rosemary, "but you might see it goes by the six thirty post, will you? I don't want it to go earlier as I may have something to add. And I don't want them to hear till I'm through with this afternoon's business. I rather expect to be home myself in time to deal with it, but I can't be quite sure."

Rosemary looked at the envelope; it was addressed to Scotland Yard.

"Where are you going?" she asked bluntly.

"To find the last link in the chain."

"That'll bind the real murderer?"

"I hope so."

"It's all right, is it? I mean, your writing to the police looks as if you were afraid something might happen."

He stooped his head to her level. "On my honour, I'm taking no unnecessary risk. You'll see me back to dinner anyway. I've now got to get all the evidence I suspect but can't prove. By this time tomorrow I think Denis may be with us."

On his way to the station he turned into a post office and spent a quarter of an hour telephoning; then he went on quickly to Cannon Street and caught his train with thirty seconds to spare. It was a dreary wintry afternoon, and as they approached Roxham a dense mist obscured the countryside; Egerton shivered; the chill December twilight was already enfolding the small desolate houses that had been dumped by the side of the railway. Once he made

a sudden movement, striking his hands together sharply. "Of course," he exclaimed. "That's it. Fool I was not to see it before. I'll prove that too, before I go back." Then the train drew up at a sprawling ungainly station that was built to resemble Battle Abbey and Egerton swung himself off and found himself on an indifferent country road. Roxham was a transmogrified village that wanted to look like a town and failed dismally. There were a few genuine old cottages clustered near the station, with tiny bare gardens and a beaten foot-track past the gate; the High Street began with little old-fashioned shops and suddenly blossomed into modern flaring fronts, with a great deal of red brick and plate-glass window. The houses underwent the same change. There were two or three quite beautiful grey stone houses with wide porches and gracious frontages, and then without warning the village broke into an eruption of small red villas dotted carelessly all over the ground, without any regard for symmetry or charm. One of these was Egerton's objective. It stood on a wide stretch of common-land, a little apart from the rest, the first of a row whose skeletons were now being erected. Egerton saw that there was plenty of garage space but none for a nursery.

Lecoq must have been watching for him for as he pressed the shrill electric bell the door opened. The small hall was so dark that the combination of twilight and fog made it impossible for the two men to see one another with any distinction. Lecoq apologised in a slightly nervous voice with a marked French accent, as he closed the door, saying that

there had been some mishap with the lighting and that it was not yet operative.

"Candles served our grandparents," replied Egerton gravely. "May I leave my coat here?"

As he turned towards the hat-stand near the door a telephone bell began its incessant jangling.

"Pardon!" murmured the Frenchman, and hurried into a small living-room to the right of the hall. Egerton could not avoid hearing the conversation, which on Lecoq's side was very brief.

"That is well," said the accented voice, "it is as I supposed."

Egerton, having paused for that moment in the hall, came into the room as his host hung up the receiver. A lamp had been kindled and set on a table against one wall; it threw a fitful and smoky radiance on the room and the two men who faced one another. Egerton saw a tall sallow man, with wings of oiled black hair on either side of a centre parting; with gold-rimmed glasses fitted with heavy lenses; with a slightly nervous manner and a suggestion of a limp; with a curled black moustache and a black beard standing well away from the chin. And he knew that he was now facing the mysterious stranger who had frequented Mrs. Davenport's flat in Pontifex Mansions, who had been her lover, probably her accomplice in her husband's murder, who had threatened her with exposure unless she agreed to his outrageous demands, and who had, in a final gust of uncontrollable fury, strangled her on the evening of Monday, the 7th December.

Lecoq said politely, "M. Egerton, I think? I am sorry to bring you so far, but—*vous voyez*. He is a

pitiless man and he would not let one little life stand in his path."

Egerton thrust his hands deep into his pockets, shut the door lazily with one foot, and said, "Afternoon, Rossiter. I believe you're right. Not even mine, what?"

There was a quick intake of breath from the other side of the table; Egerton was still on his feet, leaning negligently against the door. "I'll call you Lecoq if you prefer it, though I think it's overdoing the artistry of the piece. And you can go on wearing that wig and beard in case any of the village looks in wanting French lessons, or your wife returns. But I'm grateful for this privacy, because there are a few things I want to say, and hear you say. May I sit down?"

He drew out a chair near the table with his foot.

Rossiter had recovered his normal suavity. "By all means. Perhaps I should warn you that I am armed. Possibly you won't object to putting your hands on the table."

As he spoke he opened his hand to show a small Browning aimed at his companion's heart. Egerton, however, proved disappointing. He didn't look surprised or nervous and he didn't attempt to whip a revolver out of his pocket as Rossiter had half expected.

Instead, he remarked drily, "I am thrice armed."

Rossiter frowned. "I beg your pardon?"

"I would refer you to Henry VI. 'Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just.' "

"That," agreed Rossiter courteously, "must be a great consolation to you."

Egerton's brows went up. "Consolation? You think I have need of it then?"

"I think you will have. In the mean time I shall be—let me say interested—to know how you could be so certain."

"That you strangled Mrs. Davenport? Oh, it wasn't very clever of me to find that out. You gave yourself away so hopelessly. It's a mistake for a criminal to have too calculating a brain. He overreaches himself."

"As I did?" Rossiter's tone was still suave, but it held an outraged note that Egerton detected instantly.

"Exactly. That bus-ticket, you know. A glaring error that, if I may say so."

"By all means. You have so very little time to say anything any more that it would be sheer cruelty on my part to deny you your opportunity."

Egerton shrugged slightly. "So? Then at least let me have the privilege of explaining to you where you went wrong."

Rossiter bowed. "I shall be charmed."

"First of all, then, there was the ticket. That was a mistake. You would have had, I think, sufficient evidence to convince a jury from the blotting-paper you so cleverly persuaded Miss Tudor to leave in Brinsley's room. Diabolically clever that was, because you thought you'd successfully shut her mouth."

Rossiter's expression changed. His pale eyes shone with an onimous gleam. "So she told you of that?"

Egerton smiled scornfully. "She didn't breathe a

word, but arithmetic was always my strong point. Of course she recognised what she'd done and why as soon as the police evidence came to light. The typewriter also—you got her entangled there as well. I imagine that, as you didn't propose to murder the lady in the first place, that was to give the impression that Brinsley was doing the blackmailing. You don't study psychology, Rossiter, do you, or you'd know that that's the sort of thing he'd never do. If ever we have psychological evidence at trials we shall get some very interesting results. And one would probably be the acquittal of Brinsley on such a charge as this, in the face of all the damning circumstantial evidence you so cunningly foisted upon him. But you made another mistake over that machine."

"Yes?"

"Rather a serious mistake. You not only gave away the fact that all the letters were typed before it passed to Brinsley but also the fact that the whole thing was a damned rotten plot between you and Mrs. Davenport—your mistress fourteen years ago, I think, and also during the few weeks between her return and her death." His voice was smooth, his lips smiled, but there was a look about him that was unpleasant. Rossiter was glad he held the last ace that would trump even Egerton's king. He was, in fact, very glad indeed that he held it. He didn't propose to play it just yet, not until he saw exactly how keen was his danger and how best to avoid it, thanks to this young cub's infernal interference.

"To resume. Are you wondering how I could be so sure she was your mistress? By the process of

elimination. It couldn't have been Voisey, who shared your privileges at the last," again that soft unpleasant smile, "because he was too young. I was certain it wasn't Brinsley. But you were a cosmopolitan; you persuaded her to come back to England. You were a business man; you found her remunerative employment. And a business man doesn't speculate unless he can count on handling profits later on. What were you getting out of it if she wasn't being as kind to you now as she had once been years earlier?"

"You're very slick in your deductions, but you've yet to explain how you can prove that the letters were written before Brinsley had the machine. You'll find that a tough nut to crack."

"I think not. One point that was specially noticeable was that they were all done in very faint type, obviously on a ribbon that was ripe for the basket. But when Miss Tudor gave the machine to her *fiancé* she said she'd change the ribbon first. We have evidence to show that he hardly used it, and when the detective tried it out the type was still black and clear. *Touché?*"

"In other fields," observed Rossiter, "we might have acted in co-operation. You'd have made a fine business man."

Egerton let that go. He didn't even trouble to look disgusted. "Then there was the impression found on Mrs. Davenport's blotter. The police construed it into a threat against Brinsley, but she had allowed herself to use the word 'Lucille' and she never referred to your ward to Brinsley in any but the most formal way, and he strongly protested that

if she had actually used the Christian name it must have been to another correspondent. Now to whom was she likely to write in that strain but yourself? There was Voisey, of course. But that would hardly arise between them, and at that time marriage between him and Miss Tudor was out of the question because Mrs. Voisey didn't in fact die until the day the letter was written. I went through those impressions again, and that proved to me that Mrs. Davenport was in a plot with you to touch some of Miss Tudor's cash. Let me show you. You will allow me to take a pencil out of my pocket?"

"Have mine," suggested Rossiter grimly, passing him an Eversharp and a small scribbling pad.

"Thank you. Then you will remember that they ran like this.

.....I h... show h.. th..e lette
s..... have on...ore.....Luci.le

You remember how the police constructed them?

I shall show her these letters. (You have) one more (chance before they are sent to) Lucille.

But it seemed to me quite as likely that they had a totally different interpretation.

I have shown him three letters. (I must) have one more.

and then something about Lucille that doesn't really affect the case here. Exactly why you were prepared to take the risk—for blackmail is a risk—for the sake of two thousand pounds I don't know. Or perhaps I'm wronging you. Perhaps it wouldn't have been for a paltry two thousand. I didn't know Mrs.

Davenport personally, but I should suppose her quite capable of withholding the most important letter until after the marriage, Brinsley having been persuaded by various threats to give up two thousand pounds for the others. Then when he had access to his wife's fortune—this, of course, is her argument and probably yours, certainly not Brinsley's or mine—she could put on the screw a bit. For once married he wouldn't dare take any chances of losing her. A quite sound argument, too. Then you, through her, would still be at liberty to play ducks and drakes with your ward's fortune, or part of it at all events. I gather that she herself is, or was, perfectly content to leave her financial affairs in your hands. Brinsley, I think, was less complacent, and even threatened to deprive you of all interest in her—shall we say, investments?—once he had the right to make suggestions. That naturally would annoy you, and you thought it splendid if you could contrive such a hold over her money that he wouldn't dare move. You see, Mrs. Davenport could always threaten to tell you of the affair, and he wouldn't dare run that risk either, because you'd probably consider it your duty to warn your cousin. Anyway, the details don't matter much at this stage. You laid the plot very prettily, and it must have been a nasty shock when your victim wouldn't fall for it. By the way, that date they found on Mrs. Davenport's blotter: they linked it up with the rest of the letter, but, of course, that was actually the imprint of the letter she wrote to Denis and that he destroyed. The letter to you must have been written some days earlier, since she had the fourth letter

before her death. But," he added politely, "I'm taking up your time. We'll go straight on to the night of the murder. I don't know why actually the murder took place. I suppose you discovered about Voisey? Or did Mrs. Davenport threaten you with what took place fourteen years ago? At all events, you throttled her, and then realised your position. You, of course, had all the information at your finger-tips. You knew where she kept Brinsley's letters; you knew that if you kept those and left the typewritten menaces the police would run the machine to earth in Brinsley's flat. You thought out the scheme of telephoning his laboratory and his house; you even contrived to get the bus-ticket. I told you I spotted the criminal by a process of elimination. But I should really give you the credit. All the eliminating was done by you. It was brilliant, the manner in which you got that ticket. Of course, the obvious argument was that if you were in your house at five forty-five you couldn't conceivably have been at Oxford Circus at six. I suppose you banked on its not occurring to anyone else that it's possible to take a fourpenny ticket and get out at the end of the penny stage. But it occurred to our man and it occurred to me. Well, you taxi'd home, arriving at a quarter to six in time to take Voisey's call, which was a nice bit of evidence if your movements had been challenged, and later went to your club where you were dining with Brinsley. It so happens that I know Carruthers. Carruthers," he added, seeing a faintly puzzled look cross the other man's face, "was the man talking to your guest when you arrived. He gave me just that casual information I

wanted. You came in shortly after Brinsley, went straight to the cloak-room to hang up your coat, talking to a friend; you came back smoking a cigarette, and as you parted you laughed and said "Last year's, fortunately." Now that might mean nothing, but it might be important. I tried to see if I could make it fit in with my theory. And I could. It was odd, I thought, to light a cigarette immediately before dinner; and it was odd for Brinsley, who isn't a particularly punctual person to arrive before you. Of course, that was your intention; otherwise you would have had no opportunity to slip the ticket into his cuff. It was ridiculous to imagine that you'd try and force Miss Tudor to do that. It would be too great a risk in any case, because in spite of the rain Brinsley might wear the blue coat. And you didn't know it was going to rain, did you? Or can you smell wet weather coming? Then you lighted a cigarette and carelessly held the match to the cuff of that coat-sleeve. Hanging up, you see, the under-side would be uppermost. You hoped, I suppose, to be alone for a minute while that part of the job was done and when you weren't you hoped by talking to distract the other man's attention. You couldn't have done that, though, because he obviously commented on the smell of burning, and as you came out into the lounge you said "Last year's, fortunately" meaning last year's coat. And when he read about the murder he wouldn't think of connecting the two. As a matter of fact, when I'd got that far I tried to experiment on an old coat of my own. It's a very short job, because you only need to scorch the coat, not actually burn

it, and the odour is very slight. A man coming into the cloak-room five minutes later wouldn't be likely to notice it."

"Why did you enter Parliament?" asked Rossiter drily.

"Because I preferred it to the Secret Service."

"There's only one more point on which I shall ask you to satisfy my curiosity," Rossiter went on smoothly. "You were making enquiries about Mlle. Lecoq. So for that matter was Scotland Yard, and, I believe, your own private detective. When you got Lecoq's letter why did you suspect a trap? Weren't you hoping for news?"

"I was, though there's no particular reason why I should have got it before the others . . ."

"I thought," broke in the other a shade maliciously, "that that was your reputation!"

Egerton bowed. "If I may say so, you played into my hands there. You had realised, of course, that we were on the right track."

"You were, you mean. That thick-headed detective of yours was following the wrong fox all through the hunt."

"I shouldn't, however," Eggerton continued, unmoved, "have suspected anything but for one small mistake."

"And that was?"

"It was, as the Victorian ladies phrased it, the hand of Providence that sent me to my club rather than to my house. You had forwarded the duplicate letter, you will remember. Now that letter was written in French, excellent colloquial second-class tradesman's French; the handwriting was foreign;

so was the paper. You didn't, by the way, explain why you should be in England, but after all that wasn't my affair. But at the head of the enclosure you wrote the word "COPY." Any Frenchman under the sun writing a letter in his own language would have put "COPIE" instinctively. That small slip betrayed you. As a politician I have to notice trivial details. You may have observed if you read the debates . . . No? Well, you may take my word for it that it is so."

"I congratulate you," said Rossiter slowly, and there wasn't a shadow of sarcasm in his manner. "It's a brilliant feat of deduction. You read detective stories?"

"Invariably."

"You should write them. Or rather, I will say you should have written them. Now I'm afraid your time is too circumscribed."

"I wonder," murmured Egerton negligently, stifling a yawn.

"Yes. You won't go out of this house alive. Well, don't be ridiculous. How could you? You know too much."

"Perhaps," suggested his companion slowly, "others also know it."

Rossiter shook his head confidently. "I don't think so. I think you've kept this to yourself that you may present it with its coping-stone perfect to Scotland Yard. It's a dangerous policy sometimes. The Cat That Walked Alone must have realised its disadvantages when it was beset by its foes."

"And if I don't walk alone?"

Rossiter leaned forward till his face was close

to the other man's. He smiled. "Shall I tell you what you've done? You've left a letter behind for the police so that if you don't turn up they'll know not only the whole story but where you came this afternoon. With that letter you've enclosed the one coming from Bertrand Lecoq—isn't that so?"

Egerton nodded. His face was grim enough now. "Let me tell you what happened to that letter. At half-past three a man called at your house, saying that he came from the Yard, that serious danger was apprehended for you and that the authorities were anxious to know whether you had left any message as to your whereabouts. That letter has been given to him, and ultimately it will come to me. Well?"

"Just like a crook play," approved Egerton.

"Exactly. Just like a crook play. And now?"

"What are your plans?"

"There is a car in that garage. When it goes out you will accompany it. Neither it nor you will return."

"That's not original. You've borrowed it from G. K. C.," Egerton accused him.

"I am always glad to pay my tribute to a master's brain. But what a criminal that man would have made!"

"You won't go into further details, I suppose?"

"It would be brutal to elaborate. It is unfortunate," he wound up, "that you did not take anyone into your confidence. Even if the police prosecute enquiries in this neighbourhood no one will trace any resemblance between the gentleman with

the wig and beard and Julian Rossiter. And I have planned my own alibi."

"And afterwards, when I'm out of the way?"

"They will presumably hang Sir Denis Brinsley, unless they can get up sufficient evidence against Voisey."

"They'll never bring the beard home to him. Of course, you got 'em abroad last summer, meaning to offer us this shadow-show in due course. That's why they can't be traced. So you knew Voisey was suspected?"

"Your logic is unassailable," sneered Rossiter. "Yes, of course I knew. It was my business to know how things went."

"Of course," mused Egerton, "it was quite impossible that it should have been him. He had none of the necessary data. He hardly knew Brinsley, couldn't have faked his hand-writing with any certainty. I doubt if he'd ever heard of Graham, and wasn't in the least likely to know anything about the previous affair in France. He would hardly even know about the pipe-lighter. The thing was absurd on the face of it. I doubt if he could even have faked a woman's voice. We know you can, because Brinsley heard you on the night of the dinner-party taking off the Co-ops. Most of all, there was the typewriter. He might have known Miss Tudor had given it to Brinsley, though that's unlikely, but it was ridiculous to suggest that he had any part in the blackmailing. In fact it's ridiculous to suppose that anybody outside a lunatic asylum would have attempted to blackmail Mrs. Davenport. She so ob-

viously hadn't a penny. But it's quite reasonable to suppose that she'd join issue with you in a scheme to ruin Denis, because she's the type of woman who never forgives a young man whom she's failed to snare."

"Puritan young cub!" growled Rossiter. "Any man with a drop of blood in his veins would have been thankful for anything he could get."

"Some of us," pointed out Egerton delicately, "don't care about second-hand goods. Are you prepared to let Voisey take the risk of arrest without stirring a finger?"

"I?" Rossiter's mask fell; his eyes protruded, his lips closed like iron upon one another; he was white with hatred. "I save that—that— . . ."

Egerton nodded gently. "Ah, so it was because of him that you killed her? I thought so. What the policeman on my beat calls a 'cream pashunelle.' "

"Yes," continued Rossiter fiercely, "and it would have given me great pleasure to have strangled him also."

"Instead of leaving him free to marry your ward?"

"Why not?" demanded Rossiter brutally. "She's his mistress."

"That is a thing that should not be said among gentlemen," Egerton pointed out coldly. "Particularly as it is probably a lie."

"Oh no. You shall speak as you please now, since it's your last chance. But how else do you suppose I could prevent her telling the police about the blotting-paper?"

"I didn't say appearances weren't on your side. I only said your statement was a lie."

"I wasn't aware you knew my ward so well."

"As I pointed out just now, Rossiter, you're not a good psychologist."

"Good enough to realise that you'd come here alone." He threw back his head and laughed in an ugly way. The last word was to lie with him. "You wouldn't want to share the victory with anyone. Just as you wanted all the kudos in the Chandos case with the result that your wife . . ."

"Stop that," warned Egerton sharply. "I'm not discussing my domestic affairs."

Rossiter laughed again. "Got you on the raw at last, my friend? All the same, you should have profited by your lesson and shared your confidence this time. Wasn't once enough? It might have damaged your precious career, marrying a convict's widow . . . By God, if you move a finger I'll fire."

But Egerton was too quick for him. The men had been facing one another, both leaning forward a little, their arms lying on the edge of the table; the revolver was close to Rossiter's hand and well out of Egerton's reach. But before the murderer could grasp it the younger man's fist shot out and toppled him off his chair. He made one frantic grab at the weapon as he fell, but his fingers missed it. Egerton had no thought for the protection of civilisation; the dark blood was in his cheeks, and he was swayed by an impulse of primitive fury.

"You hound!" he exclaimed, "if that hasn't broken your foul neck get on your feet and I'll show

you how it's done. It would be a pity to waste a rope. Oh, all right," as the other eyed him suspiciously, "I shan't kick you as long as you're on your knees."

Rossiter rolled over, struggled slowly up catching at the table for his support, feinted and suddenly grasped the revolver, simultaneously springing erect.

"That's your last word," he cried savagely, but as he lifted his arm there was a report from the doorway; Egerton instinctively leaped to one side. A moment later he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turning saw a stranger ready to prevent further hostilities. Jamieson and a plain-clothes man were at Rossiter's side going through the formality of arrest, before they turned their attention to the broken arm. Egerton moved a shade distant from his companion and looked out of the window at the impenetrable twilight. No one had ever guessed how sick the sight of blood invariably made him; even two years in France hadn't inured him to that.

From the other side of the table Rossiter spoke, and all the savagery had gone from his voice now. He was a gambler to his finger-tips and it was against his code to complain when the cards were contrary.

"Game *and* rubber, I think," he observed bowing ever so slightly. "If we may forget that last unfortunate incident, it would be a favour if you'd tell me how it was done."

Egerton, his pale face silhouetted against the dark wall, seemed for a minute as if he would disregard that last request. Jamieson realised that he

was momentarily beyond speech. There was a short silence. Then Egerton said unemotionally, "You weren't taking any risks, Rossiter, and nor was I. You had your life at stake, and I had a friend. As I've told you twice already, you're a bad psychologist. I'd had my lesson, as you pointed out. I knew your men would call for that letter, and on my way to the station I called up my house and told them to give it up if it was asked for. It's quite genuine, I didn't want to sow suspicion in your mind. And I also called up Brinsley's lawyer and asked him to make the necessary arrangements for—your escort. They came by car from the opposite direction. When that opportune telephone call came—I suppose that was to tell you that the letter had been salvaged—I took the opportunity to open the door you'd just shut. There's no point in damaging property unnecessarily, and under cover of our most engrossing conversation they could steal up—like Arabs, wasn't it? It was the only way to get evidence against you. They've heard your confession . . ."

"You were taking a pretty big risk. I might have shot you on sight or without warning at any minute during the interview."

"Some risks have to be taken," said Egerton stonily. "There was no other way. The evidence was too circumstantial, and in any case it would have involved Miss Tudor. I was particularly anxious to avoid that."

"You're very considerate of her feelings."

"I'm thinking chiefly, I confess, of the man she's going to marry." And then, as if even he couldn't

stand this much longer he glanced at a watch on his wrist and said regretfully, "I'm afraid I've missed the five o'clock, and there isn't another train till nearly seven."

"I'm sorry we can't offer you a seat in the car," said Jamieson instantly, "but we're full up as it is. And anyhow it's irregular."

"Of course. It must be the train. It's a nuisance, though. I'm dining a man from my constituency at my club to-night, a most important fellow. But touchy. He won't consider this afternoon's entertainment, which is no concern of his, a sufficient excuse for cooling his heels for an hour."

There was a new step on the crazy paving pathway, someone pushed open the front door and another figure appeared, a small figure wrapped in a leather driving coat, wearing a small hat crushed firmly over shingled auburn hair.

"Aren't you ever coming, Scott? I've been waiting ages and the engine's nearly cold and you've run it pretty fine as it is."

Egerton whirled round. "Rosemary!"

"Of course. Come along." But though she contrived a smile and refused even to notice Rossiter, he felt her hands and found them stone-cold, and saw that she trembled a little.

"I've had your clothes sent to the club," she observed, "so you'll just have time. And I said, in case we were late, that you'd been called most urgently and unexpectedly into the country but would Peacock wait. Servile apologies and so forth."

"You ought to be married to the whole House of

Commons," murmured her husband, as he put the rug round her knees. "I'll drive, shall I?"

"Please."

For a time they travelled swiftly and in silence. Then Egerton broke out passionately, "Rosemary, for Heavens' sake, why?"

She turned to him with like passion; there was a protesting note in her voice and a new vivid gleam in her eyes that emphasised her eager beauty.

"Did you think I could stay at home and play patience? I took your message. I knew you were in danger for Denis. I didn't grudge you to him, but I wasn't going to be left out. Suppose your plans had miscarried?"

He remembered a time when they actually had and said nothing. But presently he asked in sombre tones. "And what if they had? You wouldn't have stood an earthly against that blackguard. It was crazy to come, to take that risk."

The car drew up at a level crossing and a train came sweeping round the bend.

"Do you think I'm a stone?" Rosemary flashed.

The train thundered past them; they could see the faces at the windows very white in the glare. Scott Egerton turned a little in his seat.

"You know well enough what I think," he said unsteadily.

The gates swung slowly apart again; the smart Buick tore on towards London.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER THE PLAY

AS Egerton had prophesied they got a magnificent press, even attracting some of those serious-minded papers that have scant space to spare for records of crime. The murder itself had aroused widespread interest, but the solution was received with overwhelming excitement. Nobody bothered much about Rossiter. His guilt was palpable. He would be hanged. That was a foregone conclusion. Then let him hang. But the other actors in the drama—Denis Brinsley, Lucille Tudor, Scott Egerton—were flooded with limelight. The burden of this ultimately fell on the young politician who placidly allowed it to sweep over his head, ignoring its persistent brilliance, while he went on tranquilly with his normal work.

On the day following Rossiter's arrest Egerton went down to meet Denis when he came out of the prison. It was late afternoon, for red tape and the exigencies of the law did not allow for swifter action. Brinsley looked haggard and exhausted, and not nearly as relieved as might have been expected. There had been a keenness about him in all the years Egerton had been his friend that was completely absent now; he seemed as if he scarcely cared for the life they had graciously given back to him.

He got rather silently into the car, saying, "I hear this is all your doing, Scotty."

"If you're fretting about the publicity," put in Egerton, neatly stealing the road, "you're wasting your time. No mud will be slung except at Rossiter. I have a letter from Miss Tudor, that I shall produce if necessary, saying that as soon as the evidence is sufficiently complete she will come forward—is aching to come forward, in fact—and tell everything that may be expedient—as to the blotting-paper, typewriter, etc."

Watching secretly, he saw his companion's face change and realised that the fear that had racked him was appeased at last. But Denis only said unemotionally, "I'm going to faint, I think. I'm sorry."

Egerton steered the car into a quiet square and produced a flask of brandy.

"Have a sandwich?" he offered.

"No, thanks. I couldn't touch them. No, it's no use your displaying them. . . ."

"You don't mind my having some?" suggested Egerton mildly. "I haven't broken my fast yet."

He ate complacently, until Denis suddenly joined him. "That's better," he murmured, folding up the papers and stowing them in the pocket of the car. "Now we'd better hurry."

"Where are we going?"

"Maida Vale."

"What the deuce for?"

"Miss Tudor has had a flat lent to her there."

"Lucille . . . ? But . . ." he caught urgently at his companion's arm.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," expostulated Egerton, "even if you're anxious to commit suicide I am a husband and prospective father."

"Lucky devil!" muttered Denis bitterly, and then realising the import of that added, "Oh congratulations and so forth. I didn't know."

"How should you? I only heard the news myself last night."

"All the same," said Denis hardly, "it's no good taking me to Maida Vale."

"It doesn't occur to you, I suppose, that you owe Miss Tudor something? She's had a much worse time than you have all along the line. You have had your backers, but she hasn't had a soul. How would you like to know that everyone's branded you as one of the Unforgivables who threw a chap up the first time he was under the weather? To have your name coupled with a possible murderer, as laying the false trail against you? To have to sit tight and let 'em go on saying it just for your sake? You're not much of a fellow, Denis, after all. I'll bet that girl hasn't had a moment's peace since they took you off. She's been forced to keep silence because an indiscreet move would have ruined things; she had to wait right up till the last moment, knowing she was daily brushing shoulders with a murderer. A pretty gay time, you'll agree."

Denis took something out of his breast-pocket. "And this? Is this part of the defence scheme?"

"Certainly," said Egerton equably, who wasn't a politician for nothing.

Denis shook an incredulous head. "You're a

clever brute, Scotty, and I don't doubt you can lie like hell, as you can do most things. But you aren't God. You can't know everything."

"You can put that bauble away. I know all about it. Keep it till you've another opportunity of offering it to Miss Tudor."

"Offering it. . . . This thing's gone to your head. Why do you suppose she sent it back?"

"I should ask her," suggested Egerton imperturbably.

"I think not," returned Denis in a tense voice. "You might drop me near my flat if you're going that way."

"I'm not. I'm going to Maida Vale. Here we are. No. 8 is yours."

Denis sat back stubbornly. "I'm not going to push my way in there without an invitation. She's going to marry Voisey."

"Did she tell you so?"

"Of course she is. She was in love with him years ago."

"You," pointed out Egerton with singular lack of delicacy, "were in love with Mrs. Davenport years ago. I thought a she-devil divine at about Miss Tudor's age. You've forgotten, I think, that since that time Voisey's had an *affaire* with a Mrs. Davenport. Did you not know? Well, it's a fact. And that, naturally, doesn't endear him any more to a girl."

"Poor Lucille!" muttered Denis and winced. "Her men have let her down pretty badly, haven't they? Rossiter and Voisey and myself. . . ."

"There's no reason why you . . . Do you pro-

pose to sit in front of this flat for the rest of the evening like a mascot in the car?"

"I'm not going to force myself on her. In the circumstances . . ."

Egerton, whose nerves were more frayed by this experience than anyone but Rosemary guessed, yielded to a rare spasm of ill-temper. "Why the hell we've wasted all this time trying to get you out of this infernal mess Heaven only knows. You make me sick, Denis." He flung himself out of the car and strode into the flats.

Lucille herself opened the door; Hurlingham Court, Maida Vale, did not run to *service*.

"I've been wanting to see you," she began as he stepped into the hall. "It's about Denis, of course."

"He's outside," interrupted Egerton.

"Outside?"

"Yes. Waiting for you to invite him in."

She shrank back instantly. "Here? But how can I? How can I ever face Denis again? I never saw him properly till—this—happened. Those others, Gilbert and his circle, always climbing little toy trees and trying to sit on the very point and pushing down all the others who wanted to sit up there with them. And then seeing a bigger tree and rushing and fighting to get to the point of that and keep it all to themselves. Always and always. Denis never even stepped into their petty little intriguing world."

Egerton looked puzzled. "Then if you felt like that why did you send him back his ring?"

"Don't you see, I'd already begun to recognise that Cousin Julian was mixed up in this, and I thought if he hadn't any suspicions of me he might

let fall some hint that would help Denis. But if he thought I was on Denis' side he'd shut up like an oyster and I'd never have a chance of doing anything for him. So I had to make that public denial —how Dick loathed me!—to win Cousin Julian's confidence. And after all," she wound up bitterly, "I couldn't do a thing. He wasn't giving a single trick away. It was an unnecessary gesture."

" 'They also serve who only stand and wait,' " quoted Egerton, "if you can get any consolation out of that. Milton apparently could. All the same, I think Denis deserves a hearing. He's a fool, of course. . . ."

"He isn't," she cried furiously.

"But he's been kicking himself pretty severely, so you might let him down easily."

"Let—him—down!" She looked at him with magnificent scorn. Egerton laughed as he ran downstairs to the waiting car. Denis sat stiff and sullen by the driver's seat.

"Go up, Galahad. Never keep a lady waiting."

Lucille was standing near the small fire. Whatever she had meant to say in greeting to her one-time lover froze on her lips at sight of him. He looked broken, exhausted, fine-drawn as a shadow.

She whispered, "So this is what I did for you," and added so low that he didn't hear, "And I would die for you—gladly."

He crossed to the window. "You sent me back my ring, Lucille. Why did you want to see me? Not to explain surely? It is its own explanation."

Her voice when it came was unsteady; all the humiliation of the past weeks culminated in this

moment. "I wanted to find out if you could be generous enough to let me have it back. No, wait a minute. There's something to be said first. . . ."

He wheeled. "I don't want to hear it, Lucille. Let the dead past bury its dead, as I used to recite at the age of seven."

But she backed from him. "You must hear. It's been a ghost between us from the start. Did you wonder why it was I didn't come forward when they found that blotting-paper?"

"Because you thought I had murdered her?" he hazarded. "No, don't look like that, sweetheart. How should I guess? I know you weren't in love with me. It was Voisey, wasn't it? Don't look so wretched. You couldn't help that."

"Yes—Gilbert. Cousin Julian knew that, too."

"Did he blackmail you? I don't understand. How could he?"

"Because he knew he had only to give his version to be generally believed, and that meant social ostracism for me. I was such a coward I couldn't face it at first. Afterwards I didn't care. I only cared you shouldn't be hurt any more. Mr. Egerton was right—I hurt you more than any of them."

"I'll wring his confounded neck," exclaimed Denis furiously. "All damn' rot, darling. He talks no end of hot air. That comes of being an M.P. They all do it."

"He was right, though. I suppose even M.P.s are sometimes. One pays very heavily for folly, Denis."

"I know," he agreed with twisted lips, "I've just proved it."

"I was in love with Gilbert when I was seventeen, and it seemed to me terrible that he should be married to someone who didn't care but who wouldn't set him free. He used to take me out sometimes to Battersea and Camden Town and show me the thrushes and larks in tiny cages on the walls of the tenements there. And I knew he meant that he was like that. I couldn't bear it. I wanted to comfort him, give him everything, and when he asked me to go away with him it seemed a romantic adventure. It wasn't till we got to the hotel and it was too late that I felt sure everyone knew about us, and I saw things properly, and realised what I should be by morning—it was horrible. I suppose I didn't really love him, or I shouldn't have cared. Of course, at the eleventh hour it was too late to save appearances or prevent people talking. As Gilbert said, if I funked things at half-past ten at night I must take the consequences. I couldn't get back before morning. Cousin Julian said then he believed my version; perhaps he did that to comfort me. Anyway I never thought he wouldn't, that anyone who said he cared for me, as he had done, could disbelieve me. And then this happened."

"And you suspected him?"

"I knew. But I daren't let him think so."

"And he threatened to tell everyone . . . ?"

"Yes. I couldn't face that. At the beginning it was only for myself. Then I realised that Gilbert had been in the thick of a liaison with this woman, just casually, *pour passer le temp,* and it would have been like that with me, too. And then I thought of you. I hadn't thought much about you before. But I

couldn't bear the things people would say of you because of me. They'd have cheapened you, and I knew you'd hate their pity. But I couldn't save you from it."

"And now?"

"Now?"

"I mean—Voisey. . . ."

"He's gone out of my world."

He seemed past speech; he stood watching her, pleading with her to be generous to his inarticulate desire.

"I haven't any world but you," she said bravely. "May I have my ring?"

His expression changed; the rigid despair had already passed, but now he seemed ashamed and bewildered. "What an inhuman ass I must have been. Scotty was right. I make the most infernal mess of things. I ought to have been a robot, my darling, living in a laboratory. It's about all I'm fit for. That you should have been too much afraid to tell me the truth, and put it out of the way once and for all! You couldn't have believed I cared two straws about you. But, Lucille, I do love you—terribly. Forgive me for being such a fool. And promise me, sweet, you'll never have a secret from me again."

Lucille promised.

"One more point," said Denis presently, struggling into a more upright position. "No, don't move. I'm very comfortable as I am. I don't think we need waste any more time. Are you very busy next week or will you cancel your engagements on my account? You will? There's devotion for you. Any day but

Tuesday will suit me. I've got a rather important session meeting on then."

"Wednesday?"

"Why not Monday?"

"Why?"

"It's sooner. Dick might elect to get married on Tuesday and I don't choose to be outrun by my own younger brother. Then it's Monday? Swear you won't be late? I shall suffer the pangs of death for every minute you don't arrive. See?"

Lucille, who looked like some exquisite statue flushed into life, murmured shyly, "I'll be five minutes early."

And was.